

To my Mother and Father

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ENGLISH AND FRENCH THEORIES OF
TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

Based on the appreciation of
Shakespeare in France

With special reference to :

"Hamlet"	"The Taming of the Shrew"
"Othello"	"A Midsummer Night's Dream"
"Macbeth"	The Falstaff Plays
"King Lear"	"As You Like It"
"Measure for Measure"	

by

Peter Platt

Thesis offered for the
Degree of Ph.D. in the
Faculty of Arts at the
University of Birmingham
1st. October 1957

Synopsis

This work discusses the theory of the Tragic and the Comic as revealed in the French approach to Shakespeare's tragedy and comedy, with particular reference to certain examples of each genre.

In part I, chapters 1-4 inclusive examine questions which are basic to the understanding of Shakespeare in France.

Chapter I considers some of the chief difficulties of translating Shakespeare's English into written French.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the reception of Shakespeare's plays by the French critics.

The following chapter will show the extent of the gulf between Shakespeare and the French mind, while the last part of this introductory quartet prepares the way for the later chapters by discussing why it should be necessary to separate comedy from tragedy when dealing with "Shakespeare and France".

In part II, chapters 5-9 inclusive deal with the French approach to Shakespeare's tragedy, the first two of them being based on "Shakespeare and Corneille" and "Shakespeare and Racine" respectively.

Chapter 7 introduces the subject

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of the poetry of Shakespeare's tragedies and compares it with similar French poetry.

The next chapter is an attempt to interpret the worst difficulty still experienced by the French in approaching Shakespeare's tragedy, namely the mixing of comedy with it.

Chapter 9 concludes this section by illustrating two instances where the French critics have been unable to appreciate Shakespeare's tragedy.

In part III, chapters 10-16 inclusive turn to the question of the French approach to Shakespeare's comedy, the first of them trying to throw some light on the complex differences and similarities between French and English comedy.

Chapter 11 is based on "Shakespeare and Molière", and chapter 12 shows that there is a strain of Shakespearean humour in French literature, though not necessarily where it is generally looked for.

A chapter on Falstaff is followed by reference to the question of "moral lessons" in comedy, after which "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "As You Like It" are used to show how fancy and "golden" comedy have often baffled the French critics.

In part IV, the final chapter (chapter 17) consists of a Conclusion.

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Preface

It is still justifiable to write about "Shakespeare and France", and that for two principal reasons. First, much original thought on Shakespeare may yet come to light concerning his relationship to other great literatures. Secondly, there is still a certain French resistance to Shakespeare, and since we know that this is no longer due to ignorance or prejudice, the continuing resistance is all the more worthy of study for possible interpretations of the character of the two nations.

Thus, we shall explore some of the differences between tragedy and comedy as they are understood in England and in France, using "Shakespeare and France" as a basis for discussion.

Special reference will be made to eleven of Shakespeare's plays:

"Hamlet", "Othello", "Macbeth", "King Lear", "Measure for Measure", "The Taming of the Shrew", "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "As You Like It", and the three Falstaff plays ("1Henry IV", "2Henry IV", and "The Merry Wives of Windsor").

These are at once the plays most representative of Shakespeare's genius and those which have occasioned most comment in French literary circles.

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Several editions of Shakespeare's texts have been used in preparing this work, principally the "Variorum" edition, and, where that was not available (i.e. "The Taming of the Shrew", "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and "Measure for Measure") the "Arden" edition. References are to these editions.

In preparing this work I have been helped in numerous ways by many people, and it is a pleasure to record here my appreciation of their kind cooperation. In particular I wish to thank:

Professor Fraser Mackenzie, Professor of French Language and Literature in the University of Birmingham, who has supervised my work during the past seven years and to whom I owe a very great debt of gratitude;

Mr.J.M.Milner, senior lecturer in French in the University of Birmingham, for his help during Professor Mackenzie's year in New Zealand;

The staff of the Reference Library in Birmingham, particularly Miss.W.Payne, Shakespeare Library Assistant, for her constant kindness in helping with my research.

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Part I

Introduction

Chapter 1

Translation: considered in its application to French appreciation of Shakespeare

Sir Winston Churchill, during a visit to France, appeared upon one occasion dressed in the uniform of an Honorary Elder Brother of the Corporation of Trinity House. A French newspaper reporter who asked Sir Winston which uniform he was wearing received this reply:

"Le Frère Aîné de la Trinité".

"Mon Dieu!",

exclaimed the startled questioner in awed tones, "quelle influence!".

The spirit of this typically Churchillian encounter might be kept with advantage in the minds of all who are interested in the reception of Shakespeare in France. After more than two hundred years of French translations of Shakespeare's plays, it may seem strange to suggest that, in theory as in practice, there is every reason to suppose that they and the French written language are incompatible. However, while other problems have presented various difficulties at various times, the barrier of language has remained firmly established from first to last. What is more, while other problems vary from individual to individual, that of translation

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affects every Frenchman who studies Shakespeare (1).

One of the chief difficulties lies in the fact that the more a work is representative of national genius, the more it attracts translators. Few will deny that Shakespeare is supremely representative of English national genius, or that he has had more attention from French translators (2) than has any other of our dramatic authors. Since literature cannot be separated from life, to appreciate the measure of difference between Shakespeare in English and Shakespeare in French is to appreciate not only a difference in dramatic theories, but also a difference between the English mind and language on the one hand and the French mind and language on the other.

Shakespeare's work exists because he had certain ideas which he crystallized and put into their present material form. Now although his initial ideas may have been universal, and therefore translatable, the form in which they were materialized

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1. The same may be said with regard to "Nationalism".
(See chapter 3).

2. There are in existence, including re-editions, 63 French translations of the complete works, 57 of selections from the works, and innumerable translations of the separate plays. (For example, in addition to the above figures, there are 63 French translations, adaptations, parodies and school versions of "King Lear").

was, and remains, entirely English, and to a large extent untranslatable. Language, in other words, is merely the instrument of conveyance, and where translations fail, they fail because they must. They can often tell what was said, but they cannot tell how it was said, or with what degree of emotion.

We feel that it will be profitable, therefore, to proceed by comparing the English written language, as used by Shakespeare, and the French written language first in their component parts and then as separate entities.

The poet Alfred de Vigny thought(1) that there were close links between the language of England and that of France. While that may have been true in the Middle-Ages, each tongue has since developed along different lines, French to become the language of political documents, English the language of poetry. No matter how many dictionaries are consulted, even the translation of a single word from the one language to the other is not a matter which can be easily resolved, particularly in a country where:

"le mot juste est -----le tourment de l'orateur, de l'écrivain" (2).

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1. Footnote to his "Lettre à Lord XXX sur la soirée du 24 octobre 1829 et sur un système dramatique". The "soirée" referred to is the first performance of Vigny's "Othello".
 2. Professor Louis Cazamian. "Avant-Propos" of Mr. J. G. Anderson's "Le Mot Juste". 1932.

Words, particularly those relating to emotions, do not always correspond exactly in different languages. Speaking specifically on this point during a lecture on translation at Oxford in 1931, Mr. Hilaire Belloc said:

"-----in one tongue the connotation even of a simple word ----- will be different from the connotation of the corresponding word in another tongue. Its historical and social connections will be different; its effect upon the rhythm of the sentence and therefore upon the emotion produced will be different - all that!" (1).

Thus, "la terre", to all appearances a simple noun, is not rendered adequately by either "land", "soil", "earth" or "ground", nor can it create the same impression on the English mind as on the French. Similarly, "home" loses an indescribable something in its translation into "maison", "foyer" or "chez soi". Even words of identical spelling (2) do not always correspond exactly in both languages.

Concrete, scientific terms, where

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1. Señor Salvador de Madariaga expresses similar sentiments in: "On translating 'Hamlet'". In: "Shakespeare Survey". vol.6. 1953.
2. "Trouble" and "brave", for example.

they are not already the same, generally pass easily from one language to another, but the same is not true of words which express our emotions, that is to say words which catch at some infinite mood or meaning. Shakespeare illustrates this many times, and on at least one occasion manages to illustrate in consecutive lines the marked difference between a "poetic" and a "non-poetic" word. In the third scene of the third act of "Othello" occur these well-known lines:

"Look where he comes: Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou owd'st yesterday" (1).

Now

"mandragora" is not difficult to translate, and as "mandragore" it has appeared in the translations of Letourneur (1776), Vigny (1829), Laroche (1842), F-V. Hugo (1862), Cayrou (1876), Grammont (1882) and Aicard (1882).

What a difference, however, in the case of "medicine" and especially of "drowsy syrups". "Rendre" seems to have been the most favoured translation of "medicine", although Vigny did choose "donner" reinforced by "guérir". In other words, the

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1. Lines 384-387. The following comparison of differing French versions of these lines appears in greater detail in an Appendix to the Variorum "Othello".

poetry of which "medicine" is compact is translated into French, even by a poet, by the same verbs which have served to teach the conjugation of French verbs to generations of English schoolchildren. "Drowsy syrups" has produced a variety of renderings: "potions assoupissantes"(Letourneur), "sirops soporifiques" (Laroche), "sirops narcotiques" (F-V. Hugo), "le plus puissant narcotique"(Grammont), while the poets among them have indulged in circumlocution in an attempt to perform the impossible.

The outstanding fact is that, though none of the above translations is particularly incorrect, all of them are inadequate. Words like "narcotique" and "soporifique", although conveying the general sense, have much too precise a meaning to hint at the vague shadows of "drowsy". Yet there does not seem to be a suitable alternative. One is forced to conclude that there is in every language a magic which defies translation. One retains the meaning, but in changing the words the spell is lost.

Dealing only with the single word, then, we have seen already that the translating of Shakespeare's plays into French is not without its pitfalls.

One of the major dangers, of course, is that bad translation may suggest a bad original. For example, the French adaptations of Shakespeare by Ducis

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were translated into Spanish, Dutch and Italian before translations into those languages had been made from the original. To quote a further instance, the first Shakespearean text to arrive in Malta was the translation of Letourneur (1). The implication of this is that if some of the greatest English thoughts are to be spread abroad in a foreign language, the standard of translation must be high.

At this point, it is with the difficulty of translating phrases that we are concerned. Again there is no problem with the straightforward, concrete phrase. Peter Quince's question:

"Is all our company here?" (2)

readily

becomes:

"Toute notre troupe est-elle ici?"

in

practically all translations from that of Letourneur to that of Monsieur Pierre Messiaen.

It is when a vague sentiment or a broken thought is introduced that French translators

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1. Professor Fraser Mackenzie: "An Anglo-French Collection of Books in the Royal Malta Library". In: "Studies in French Language, Literature and History". 1949.
2. The opening lines of the second scene of "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

tend to stumble. One of the first of them, Voltaire, approached "Hamlet" in the same way that he had approached Locke. The result was that the supreme poetry of:

"To die --- to sleep --- no more"

is reduced

to three precisely defined questions:

"Que suis-je? qui m'arrête? et qu'est-ce que la mort?".

A Frenchman could answer all three questions as Voltaire poses them in a matter of minutes. One can almost hear the catechism:

"Que suis-je? - Je suis l'humanité souffrante. Qui m'arrête? - Moi-même. Qu'est-ce que la mort? - C'est le néant éternel".

In the form in which Shakespeare cast his thoughts, however, few Frenchmen can explain half of what is implied by this "simple" phrase:

"To die --- to sleep --- no more".

It needs an English mind to comprehend that, a mind used to struggling to say things which are too deep for words.

In the same piece of translation, Voltaire underlines another basic difference between

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the language of England and that of France.

"The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune"

becomes:

"la main qui m'outrage".

The important detail there is that the emphasis shifts from three nouns (two of which are concrete and dynamic) in the English to a verb in the French. This choice of a verb, which may be intellectually conceived, in preference to the more usual English practice (1) is an obstacle in the translating of Shakespeare's work into French, and in the appreciation of the subsequent translations. The verb may be the soul of French poetry, but in English poetry it is generally the nouns and epithets which provide the beauty.

Of the nouns and epithets used by Shakespeare, many have the quality of picturesqueness, which creates a special difficulty in putting his plays into French. This is specially true of the double epithets and compound nouns which he uses frequently and which are practically untranslatable. We may not expect adequate renderings of "handy-dandy"(2)

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1. That is: using, as we have seen above, concrete nouns and adjectives which are conceived more easily by eye or ear.
 2. "King Lear". Act IV.sc.vi.line 157.

or the delicious "hugger mugger" (1), which are vernacular expressions. Such is not the case, however, in scene vii of the first act of "Macbeth", where we are in the higher realm of poetry. Macbeth, in one of the finest speeches in the play, trembles at the thought of

"even-handed justice"

and, more difficult still from the point of view of translation, speaks of "angels, trumpet-tongued" (2).

In the same scene, Lady Macbeth exhorts her husband thus:

"But screw your courage to the sticking-place".

Maurice Maeterlinck, probably the best translator of "Macbeth", renders this by:

"Tendez votre courage jusqu'au point héroïque",

an adequate rendering, but lacking the

1. "Hamlet". Act IV.sc.v.line 84.

2. " ----- this even-handed justice
Commends th'ingredients of our poisoned chalice
To our own lips -----
----- this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking off".

arresting, graphic imagery of the English. No English reader really understands at first sight what this verse:

"But screw your courage to the sticking-place"

may mean, but it sounds exactly the right phrase for the crucial moment at which it is delivered. One is quite prepared to believe that no other image could replace it successfully. In French, on the other hand,

"Tendez votre courage jusqu'au point héroïque"

is merely one of several ways of saying the same thing. Monsieur Maurice Castelain, in 1937, tried:

"Vissez seulement votre courage au cran d'arrêt"

which version is nearer to the English and more arresting, but possibly too graphic for the average Frenchman. Perhaps one might combine the two French versions quoted here, so as to form:

"Tendez seulement votre courage jusqu'au cran d'arrêt".

This version has at least the merit of suggesting a stretching motion, or "screwing" as Shakespeare has it, as well as an idea of the difficulty of stretching something until it is held at its very limit, on the last notch or "sticking-place".

Lady Macbeth's injunction, therefore, underlines the profound thought which a

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translator needs to give to a mere seven or eight words, and the above is but one of the myriad figurative expressions with which Dryden thought Shakespeare's style was "pestered" (1). Thus metaphor presents a particular difficulty among the many attached to the translation of phrases, even if they be simple metaphors rather than profound poetic images (2).

The Russian translator, Boris Pasternak, has described such metaphors as "the shorthand of the spirit" (3). In other words, they form a mode of expression which, like shorthand, is either personal or sectarian, but not universal. To take an instance from the first scene of "Hamlet"(4), Francisco's way of indicating that the watch has passed uneventfully is to say:

"Not a mouse stirring".

Apart from translation, this phrase was condemned by Voltaire because it did not conform to his idea of how one should address a prince. However, Coleridge's contention that it was the language of Nature is to be preferred.

From the point of view of

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1. R.B.Johnson."Poetry and the Poets".1926.Introduction.
 2. Poetic imagery will be mentioned later(chapter 7).
 3. "Soviet Literature".September 1946. p.51.
 4. According to René Huchon ("Le style de Shakespeare". p.A.10."Les Langues Modernes".41e.année.no.3.1947), there are 279 metaphors in "Hamlet" alone.

translation, Letourneur writes:

"Pas un insecte n'a remué",

Pierre Messiaen

translates:

"Pas une souris qui bouge",

and Jules

Derocquigny slyly thinks of:

"Pas un chat qui bouge".

There are three translations of an apparently simple phrase, the first rendering the meaning without being either a strictly accurate translation of the original or a natural French phrase, the second being a literal, accurate translation, but still not a French idiom, the third being an equivalent French idiom, but not a strictly accurate translation. The version of Derocquigny is the most easily justifiable, because the translator interprets Shakespeare on the level of thought rather than of language. Even so, where this transformation is carried out to any great extent, Shakespeare's text is turned into something far different from the original.

The critic Philarète Chasles summed up the position neatly:

"La traduction littérale est un sacrilège; la transformation élégante, un mensonge" (1).

He went on

1. "L'Angleterre au seizième siècle".1879.p.315.

to add (p.326) that a literal translator is like a musician who plays his notes exactly, but the whole in the wrong key. Similarly, one might compare a liberal adaptation to one of those "arrangements" of popular classical tunes.

Those who think that Chasles exaggerates here should try to find, as he did (p.320), an entirely satisfactory translation of some such simple phrase as:

"Welcome, death!" (1).

It is difficult to find a translation which does not either disfigure Shakespeare or sound discordant to the French ear.

After this discussion of, first, the translation of single words, and then the translation of phrases, our next step is to combine words and phrases in order to study Shakespeare's verbal frivolity. This has always proved a stumbling-block to the French, not surprisingly since there may be as many as two hundred and fifty puns (2) in a Shakespeare play. These puns of Shakespeare are not to be treated as comic thoughts, because in the case of a comic thought put into words there is some possibility that a suitable translation may be arrived at by working back to the original thought. The essayist and critic Joseph Addison thus regarded it as a true test of comedy that it would bear translation into another

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1. "Romeo and Juliet".

2. "Love's Labours Lost". By contrast, one would have to search diligently through the whole of Molière to find a half-dozen.

language.

what is to happen, though, when the comedy, far from being a thought put into words, or "true comedy", actually has its being only in the words themselves, and is in fact created by them? Punning is supposed by some to be the lowest form of comedy, and by others to be the lowest only because all other forms are built upon it. In France puns are not generally popular, with the result that the quodlibets of Shakespeare are somewhat despised. Nor is that attitude confined solely to France. In this country, Dr. Samuel Johnson found them tiresome (1); so do many English readers today, for an appreciation of them involves a translation from 1600 to 1957.

The non-English reader, however, has a dual translation to make, one of time and another of language. Of the two, the second is infinitely the more troublesome, although Sir Barry Jackson's view(2) is that Elizabethan witticisms which leave English audiences unmoved, cause amusement abroad for the very reason that they have to be altered in order to be translated and understood.

As far as France is concerned, French critics generally have commented on the impossibility of translating, for example, the opening

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1. S.P.B.Mais. "From Shakespeare to O. Henry". 1917. p. 21.
 2. "Shakespeare Survey". vol. 8. 1955. p. 80.

scene of "Romeo and Juliet" (1). Now that is not a particularly inspiring or important scene, but if the translator is to leave out everything in Shakespeare which might be put into that category, Shakespeare in French will come to be unrecognizable. Shakespeare as he is or not at all! That is not some sudden outcry from a patriotic Englishman. It is a thought which has been echoed by many French admirers of Shakespeare, most recently by Monsieur Georges Pitoeff, who, after translating, acting in and producing some of Shakespeare's plays, professed himself unwilling to "sacrifier le verbe", as he put it.

Certainly Shakespeare's verbal antics form one of his specialties and are to be studied rather than dismissed out of hand. Whether such study can do anything to bring within the comparatively narrow confines of the French language the unparalleled freedom of language which Shakespeare enjoyed, seems doubtful. Perhaps Professor Allardyce Nicoll's suggestion(2) of an Elizabethan dictionary

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1. The scene begins thus:

Sampson: "Gregory, o' my word, we'll not carry coals.

Gregory: No, for then we should be colliers.

Sampson: I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw.

Gregory: Ay, while you live, draw your neck out o' th' collar.

Sampson: I strike quickly, being moved.

Gregory: But thou art not quickly moved to strike".

2. Made during the Annual Shakespeare Lecture to the British Academy. 23rd. April 1952.

might help to resolve the problem.

Shakespeare used words which have lost their meaning, words which have changed their meaning, and no doubt some which never had a meaning. Racine, on the other hand, used only words which were intelligible then, and are now, to the average Frenchman. This lends a sense of permanence to Racine's plays and avoids suggestions of an occasional archaic flavour to be found in those of Shakespeare. Yet it is only a flavour, and although Shakespeare's language may have seemed obsolete to John Dryden in 1668, there seems generally to be no justification at this present time for questioning the remark (1) that Shakespeare was the best user of one of the most copious languages in the world.

Words, phrases, metaphor and verbal antics are all joined together now for us to see how Shakespeare compares with the French written language, not in its component parts, but as a whole.

For the most part, Shakespeare's tragedy is better translated into French than is his comedy. One reason may be that tragedy is complete in itself, whereas comedy leaves something to the imagination, and it is impossible to translate that "something". However, in some respects the problems are the same for both.

It is true to say of the French

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1. Of R.W.Emerson.

language what Sherlock Holmes said of "Bradshaw":

"Its language is nervous and terse, but limited".

The French language is compact, precise and logical, but, despite the Romantic movement, it is not outstanding for its sense of the vague. In our English language on the contrary, there is a romantic element, a poetic vagueness which gives to nearly every word added powers of suggestion and of hidden meaning. French is for training the mind and for composing diplomatic documents, English is a practical world language. Furthermore, English words and metaphors may be used incongruously whereas the French tend to shun the incongruous.

The above means, then, that there are parts of Shakespeare's plays which, even though well translated, do not have the same effect on the French reader or listener as they do on his English counterpart. In support of that view, here is a part of Bottom's greeting when he returns from his scene with Titania (1):

"L'oeil de l'homme n'a point entendu,
l'oreille de l'homme n'a point vu, la main de l'homme
ne peut goûter ni sa langue concevoir ni son coeur
exprimer ce qu'était mon rêve".

Earlier, Bottom has shown us an instance of his stage-managership (2):

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1. "A Midsummer Night's Dream".Act IV.sc.ii.
 2. Ibid. Act III.sc.i.

"et il devra lui-même parler par le trou, en disant en paroles, ou en visant au même méfait: 'Mesdames', ou 'Bellesdames', 'je désirerais que' ou 'je voudrais que' ou 'je vous supplierais de n'avoir pas peur, de ne pas trembler, de ne rien craindre'".

That is against all that the French hold dear, not only as a means of expression, but as a way of life.

Shakespeare's language as a whole, both here and elsewhere, might be summed up by the comment of Theseus on the Prologue's speech:

"His speech was like a tangled chain, nothing impaired, but all disordered" (1).

Yet the French versions of Bottom's speeches quoted here have varied little in two hundred years of translation. Indeed, it is difficult to see how they could. Nevertheless, they do not read naturally in French.

Shakespeare's language came tumbling and jostling hot from the mind. In the words of Charles Lamb:

"Shakespeare mingles everything, runs line into line, embarrasses sentences and metaphors; before one idea has burst its shell, another is hatched and clamorous for disclosure".

It is not surprising, then, that the restricted, epigrammatic French language is sometimes perplexed in its efforts to cope with

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1. Act V.sc.i.

Shakespeare. To say that, however, is not to suggest that French translators have proved more inept than their English colleagues, but that we are concerned here only with English-French translation.

Thus we have discussed precision, logic and Bottom's lack of both. What of the "romantic ~~vagueness~~" mentioned earlier? We mean by this the evocative nature of much of English literature, a poetic subtlety which refuses to submit to translation. A Frenchwoman, Odette Keun, in her book "I discover the English" (1), introduces this quotation to show the evocation of which the English language is capable:

"The long day of mankind draweth forth
towards an evening and the world's tragedy and time
are nearly at an end".

There are many similar evocations in Shakespeare's works:

"Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign
eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy"
(2).

The words and meaning of such a passage are not difficult to translate, perhaps in Professor Baldensperger's lines (3):

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1. 1934. p.219.
 2. Sonnet XXXIII.
 3. "Les Sonnets de Shakespeare". 1943.

"J'ai vu bien des matins radieux, dans ma vie,
 Flatter les hauts sommets de regards souverains,
 Baiser de lèvres d'or le vert des prés voisins,
 Dorer les pâles eaux de céleste alchimie".

The sense is there, but the feeling evoked by those few lines remains elusive. One thinks of the beauty of the words rather than of the scene. We notice, moreover, how differently the French would naturally proceed in describing a dawn (1):

"Le matin descendait. Des pointes d'arbres émergèrent dans un commencement de clarté; une pâleur envahit le ciel; elle grandit, fut comme une échappée sur le jour qui attendait de l'autre côté de la nuit
 ----- La laiteuse clarté bientôt s'épandit comme une eau après que les vannes sont levées. Elle coulait entre les branches, filtrait dans les feuillées, dévalait les pentes herbues, faisait déborder lentement l'obscurité----- Et petit à petit le ciel se lama de tons d'argent neuf".

The description is not in verse now, but in carefully arranged prose, so compact that an adequate English translation will be of much greater length, so complete that it might be a photograph. It is evocative to that extent, but Shakespeare's lines evoke a feeling not of photography, but rather of painting, and thus of poetry.

It remains now to conclude this

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1. The description which follows is an extract from "Un mâle" by Camille Lemonnier.

chapter on the theory of translation as it affects French appreciation of Shakespeare. About the work of translating Shakespeare's plays into French, one may say that the initial effort has always been laudable, the result not always so.

Obviously there has been much good work, but quality has not kept pace with quantity. Furthermore, translation has sometimes been regarded as an end in itself rather than a means to an end. A translation is not to be regarded as a personal "tour de force", but as a means of conveying the thoughts, emotions and techniques of the people of one country to the people of another. In the words of the "Report on Translations" issued by H.M. Stationery Office in 1946:

"It is commonly agreed that while there can be no higher duty than to interpret to another people faithfully, precisely and gracefully the ideas of a great creative writer ----- there is often a signal failure in performance".

The report goes on to suggest that the remedy seems to consist of two parts: first, to raise the standard of translation, and, second, to secure administrative support in an attempt to ensure freer circulation of translated work.

While agreeing in principle with both those points, we are aware of a gulf here between theory and practice. The grammarians have tried to

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improve the standard of translation, and have shown themselves to be in exactly the same relationship to it as an economist is to economics. In other words, they know what other people ought to do, but are unable to do it themselves. The poets on the other hand, caring little what may or may not be desirable, have unwittingly produced translations which often could more properly be called original works (1).

French prose will sometimes translate English poetry (2). Sometimes, even, it seems more fitted to the task than French poetry. For instance, Voltaire's literal prose translation of the "to be or not to be" soliloquy is infinitely better than his version in poetry. In general, however, French prose, because of its precision, does not seem sufficiently "romantic" to capture the imaginative imagery of Shakespeare's poetry. Similarly, French poetry, because of its rigid form, is not sufficiently plastic to accommodate his blank verse.

Even if some grammatical poet or some poetical grammarian, or an assembly of both, were to produce an almost perfect translation, we might then find that the second of the problems noted by H.M. Stationery Office in its Report is the least likely of the two to be resolved. One may produce

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1. Although the best of the French poetical translations, such as Vigny's "Othello", convey most successfully the "feeling" of Shakespeare's poetry.
 2. Cp., for example, Mallarmé's version of some of Poe's poems.

good translations of Shakespeare's work, but one cannot make people read them. Ultimately, one has to decide in this matter whether a translation can be styled "good" when it achieves publication, when a hundred or a thousand people have read it, or when one person has read and appreciated it.

Modern electronics may yet emulate Señor Pío Baroja's hero, Silvestre Paradox, by inventing a "traduscope", a machine by means of which Spanish spoken into a dictaphone was automatically translated into English. Work is going on at this moment on such a machine in the University of London, and particular attention is being paid to the translation of idiom. Yet even if science does achieve this, and even if it manages to inject imagination into its perfect translations, will it at the same time invent some way of encouraging people to read or listen to what it has produced?

Meanwhile, ordinary translation must go on, even though a varying something be lost in the process. Most people have to accept the Bible in translated form, so there is every reason to be optimistic about a similar acceptance of Shakespeare's plays. Perhaps the most we can do towards this end is constantly to bear in mind the aims of good translation:

to give a complete and faithful transcription of the ideas of the original work, in a style which

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should imitate the character of the original and yet have all the ease of original composition.

That may seem an arbitrary and impracticable dictum, but no better formula exists which is more likely to lead towards that translation:

"in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language as to be as distinctly apprehended and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs, as it is by those who speak the language of the original work" (1).

1. From: "Essay on the principles of translation".
Alexander Fraser Tytler(Lord Woodhouselee). 1813.

Chapter 2

Criticism: considered in its application to French appreciation of Shakespeare

Those who study any aspect of "Shakespeare and France" soon realize that much of what has been written on the subject tends to refer to "the French people" when often it would have been more accurate to talk of "the Parisian critics".

When Sainte-Beuve described a critic as "le secrétaire du public" (1), most French thinkers would agree with him. The power in that definition lies with the public. They might not agree, however, with Sainte-Beuve's qualifying remark that the "secretary" should be one who does not await another's prompting, but who finds out, interprets and edits each morning the thoughts of the world. There, the public loses its all-powerful grasp, and some of the initiative is placed in the hands of the critic, who is no longer a mere mouthpiece.

In that way, the role of the critic in French estimation of Shakespeare is of the utmost importance. To be aware of that fact, one has only to read the comments of Théophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire and Jules Janin on the version of "Hamlet" by Dumas and Meurice (2). Gautier argued with

1. In his "Causerie" of Monday, 25th. February 1850.

2. See: "The Myth of 'Hamlet' in France in Mallarmé's Generation". René Taupin. "The Modern Language Quarterly". 1953.

Baudelaire about the merits of the actor Rouvière, who played the part of Hamlet. Baudelaire spoke at length of the influence of the theatre on Delacroix, Janin on the influence of Delacroix on the actors. All were right to a certain extent, but Shakespeare was almost forgotten in the process. The actual progression was as follows:

from the French text Delacroix made several paintings which, in turn, were studied by Rouvière. His interpretation of the part was then submitted via the stage for the approval or disapproval of the critics, whose reviews were then passed on to the general public.

this means that between Shakespeare and the French people came translators, artist, actor and critics.

As the final arbitrators, therefore, it is essential that critics placed in such a position should try to catch a glimmer of the original through all the extraneous material which accumulates in such circumstances. Unfortunately, it is often the extraneous material which has engaged the critics' attention to the detriment of real Shakespearean study. When Anatole France wrote at the beginning of one of his articles:

"Je vais vous parler de moi au sujet de Shakespeare"

he was not only making what proved to be a statement of fact, but also ironically underlining one of the chief faults of French criticism of Shakespeare.

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To read a selection of such criticism is to find frequently arguments concerning stage-lighting and scenery or castigations of fellow-critics. Now much of this is interesting, and some of it is creative criticism, but it is not Shakespearean criticism. It might apply equally well to any playwright, French or English, great or small. Thus the French people may be said to have received at times a "raw deal" at the hands of their critics (1). We accuse them of not understanding Shakespeare; the accusation should be that their own critics have sometimes made such an understanding more difficult even than it would have been in the nature of things.

The above refers principally to newspaper and magazine critics rather than their academic colleagues. This emphasis seems to be justified by the vast number of literary papers and magazines which exist in France, and by the higher status accorded in that country to the people who write for them. The writing and reading of popular literary criticism is an esteemed duty to the intellectual Frenchman, and discussion of it receives priority here because of the high proportion of the population which engages in either one or other of its twin aspects.

Turning now to the "academic" as

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1. As we shall see a few lines below, this statement refers principally to newspaper and magazine critics. The Scrapbook of their articles kept in the Shakespeare Memorial Library (Birmingham) shows an excellent cross-section of them.

distinct from the "newspaper" critic, we recall how Professor Georges Connes pointed out (1) that of the dozen or so men who have devoted themselves to Shakespeare, none is French. This is true up to a point, but the French intellect embraces width before depth, and most French critics of note, even if they have not devoted their lives to the study of Shakespeare, have given us their carefully considered views on the subject, seeing him as a part of the pattern of world literature. Monsieur J-J.Jusserand, Professor F.Baldensperger, Professor L.Cazamian and others have thus brought to bear on the question of "Shakespeare and France" first, a love of literature, and, second, the penetrating analysis which is the hall-mark of the mature French mind. It has taken a long time to modify Voltaire's conception of Shakespeare as a "génie barbare", with the emphasis on "barbare" (2), but much patient work in French academic circles has brought about a gradual change of attitude.

French academic critics have worked hard to clarify all that there is to know about Shakespeare, compiling, classifying and analyzing. The principal drawback has been that Shakespeare's work does not readily submit to clinical analysis, and French prowess in this respect has

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1. "Etat présent des études shakespeariennes".1932.p.8.

2. It must be remembered that, whatever Voltaire said about Shakespeare, he was the first person to spread his name abroad, and although the emphasis was on "barbare", the other word was "génie".

seemed sometimes to be more of a vice than a virtue.

To give an instance of this, we feel when Monsieur André Gide writes of "Othello":

"Le drame se construit entre la vraisemblance imaginaire et l'invisible réalité des sentiments"

that

the criticism is typically French: brief, brilliant, apparently definitive and, to a Frenchman, clear. Does it, however, really mean anything in terms of Shakespeare? Does it bring the French reader any nearer to "Othello"? Even though correct, is it not a criticism which any Frenchman of Monsieur Gide's standing might make about any tragedy?

This tendency of the French mind to generalize has meant, for instance, that "Othello" has been reduced in some cases to a black face and a handkerchief, while "Macbeth" has become a tale of witches and hobgoblins (1), and these reputations are more easily acquired than lost. In other words, over-careful analysis has often held a post-mortem on the body long after the spirit has flown, and has seen only component parts where there was once a living whole.

Such analysis as this, however, must eventually yield before a more rewarding

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1. Cp. the version of "Macbeth" by J-F. Ducis (1790). Ducis was a translator rather than a critic, but presumably his alterations anticipated the critics' opinions.

synthesis. When Shakespeare had been "dismantled" and each part of him examined and tested, the French, satisfied, began to reassemble the parts. Previously (1), too much French criticism of Shakespeare had tried to justify rather than appreciate him.

Miss Sylvia Leith-Ross, in her book "Cocks in the Dawn" (2) tells how, on the point of leaving France for England at the time of Pétain's armistice, she was in conversation with a bookseller in Toulouse. He told her that she must return to England and help to carry on the war:

"The English must survive", he said,
"because they gave Shakespeare to the world".

Now that more French citizens are beginning to think along similar lines, we may say that Shakespeare is being genuinely appreciated in France.

There are, then, signs of a new synthesis in French criticism of Shakespeare's plays. The difference between the new approach and the old might be epitomized by the following dialogue written by George Colman in his three-act comedy of 1770:

"Man and Wife" (or "The Shakespeare Jubilee") (3):

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1. It is difficult to give a definite date here, but French criticism of Shakespeare from 1945 onwards seems to be more "accommodating".

2. 1944. p.72.

3. Quoted by Mr.R.W.Babcock: "The English reaction against Voltaire's criticism of Shakespeare".p.625 of "Studies in Philology". vol.27.no.4.October 1930.

Marcourt (1) : " ----- his (Shakespeare's) absurdities. A baby in the first act becomes a grown person in the last -- plays made out of half-penny ballads -- ghosts and gravediggers, witches and hobgoblins -- Brutus and Cassius conversing like a couple of English Commoncouncilmen -- Hamlet killing a rat -- and Othello raving about an old pocket handkerchief -- there's your Shakespeare for you".

Kitchen (2) : "This is a mere hash of foreign criticism, as false as superficial, and made up of envy and ignorance -- Shakespeare, Mr. Marcourt - Shakespeare is the Turtle of Literature. The lean of him may perhaps be worse than the lean of any other meat; but there is a deal of green fat, which is the most delicious stuff in the world".

Marcourt's speech is a striking example of French analysis. Kitchen's reply is what English critics ought to concentrate on. The "green

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1. Who might serve to typify the general French approach to Shakespeare in the past.
2. Who represents what English critics ought to have replied years ago, and what a few Frenchmen have come to believe.

"fat" is what we must seek out and interpret. There is not always only one interpretation, there are often several.

Up to now, critics in this country, faced with several meanings, have preferred generally to avoid choosing any one of them. When foreign critics have found some absurdity or piece of violence in Shakespeare which they regarded as unpleasant and not fit to appear in a work of art, English critics, instead of trying to answer the charges by attempting to discuss their grievances, have tended instead to point out further examples of "lack of taste".

Foreign critics generally have missed the great lessons of Shakespeare: humour, freedom and tolerance, which are not always synonymous with comedy, liberty and indifference. A more interpretative criticism in England might therefore be considered.

For France, its most important task would be to try to explain the complex episodes which have long puzzled French critics. That is not to say that everything in Shakespeare must be attached to a meaning: not all that he wrote is subtle and profound. But there are many points still to be interpreted, with justification. In doing this, we must bear in mind the warning uttered

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by Mr. Clifford Leach (1):

"The interpreter's primary duties are to know his own fallibility, to be sceptical of his own simplifications, and yet to strive towards a convincing exposition of what he believes to be true!"

Those are the difficulties of interpretative criticism. In comparative literature, the position is further complicated by factors such as language and nationalism.

Writing in 1897 about "Othello", Mr. George Bernard Shaw (and he was echoed in 1948 by Mr. Godfrey Tearle) said:

"To the brain it is ridiculous, to the ear it is sublime".

Yet there is no reason why the brain, also, should not find the play sublime if only we insist on interpreting Shakespeare according to what he wrote. Professor R.G. Moulton's way of defining this method is set out in his book "Shakespeare as a dramatic artist" (2):

"Interpretation in literature is ~~xxx~~ of the nature of a scientific hypothesis, the truth of which is tested by the degree of completeness with which it

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1. "Shakespeare Survey". vol.8. 1955. p.139.
2. 1885. Introduction.

explains the literary works as they actually stand".

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same author made at the same time a plea for inductive criticism as opposed to "a priori" or judicial criticism, whose only standard is one of taste (a yardstick much used by French critics of Shakespeare).

It is sometimes said that inductive criticism is false, and that all criticism is ultimately comparative. Nevertheless, it is essential to study the question of "Shakespeare and France" on the basis of a difference of kind rather than of degree. Emphasizing this difference of kind, Signor Benedetto Croce shows (1) how French assessments of Shakespeare have been marred by judging him not on intrinsic merit, but by invidious and meaningless comparisons. Thus we have even been assured that Molière is greater than Shakespeare or that Shakespeare is greater than Racine.

Even if we could establish the truth or otherwise of those assertions, the result would be of no value: comparing literature on purely qualitative grounds is rarely fruitful. What we ought to be engaged on is the naturalizing in each literature of what is best in the others.

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1. "Ariosto, Shakespeare and Corneille". Translated into English by Douglas Ainslie in 1920. p.285.

Professor Moulton, with regard to the means by which that end is to be achieved, would proceed "scientifically". At first sight, that seems a good method for the logical, analytical, reasoning French mind to adopt. The drawback, however, is that scientific criticism tends to stress intention rather than result. Now only Shakespeare knew what impressions he intended to create, and none of us can claim some mysterious and telepathic knowledge of Shakespeare's mind. Even if we could discover Shakespeare's intentions, we might be shocked to find with Pope that, crowded theatres rather than literary reputation being the order of the day in early seventeenth-century London:

"Shakespeare (whom you and every playhouse bill
Style the divine! the matchless! what you will),
For gain, not glory, wing'd his roving flight,
And grew immortal in his own despite" (1).

We know that result is a more solid foundation than intent, for everyone who has read a Shakespeare play or seen one acted can say what particular impression it made on him or her. We might proceed, then, scientifically, but with the added benefits of sympathetic, optimistic enquiry and, above all, with imagination. Thus, Professor G. Wilson-Knight, when he describes a Shakespearean tragedy as:

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1. "Epistles and Satires of Horace Imitated".
V.Hor.II.Ep.1: "To Augustus". Lines 69-72.

"primarily an aural time sequence with rhythmic modulations" (1)

illustrates the method of a personal, imaginative criticism.

That is how the most eminent English critics of Shakespeare worked in the past(2), but their work has become obscured by modern mass-intellect.

Let us remember, however, that it is lawful to seek out only meanings which, though hidden, exist (3). Let there be no riddles about Falstaff being the opposite of the new Elizabethan glory (4), or the image of our triumph as angels over our body of the beast (5). That is the right method wrongly applied. Let us agree that Falstaff is funny because he is a fat, jovial old drunkard, and then work from there. Where reasonable meanings can be found, let them be set down in print, with, as Professor Raleigh suggested (6), a question-mark, real

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1. "Principles of Shakespeare Production".1949.pp.32-33.
 2. Hazlitt, Coleridge, Lamb and Professor Walter Raleigh, to name four.
 3. Chapter 9, for instance, will show that French interpretative criticism of "Hamlet" has resulted in the aducing to Shakespeare's tragedy of meanings which were in the French mind rather than in the play itself.
 4. Mr.Stephen Leacock."Humour and Humanity".1937.p.134.
 5. Mr.John Palmer."Comedy".1914.p.28.
 6. "Shakespeare".1907.p.110.

or implied, at the end of every line. If the French reader is convinced that he is dealing with a mind as questioning as his own, he is likely to feel a greater measure of respect, a respect which will help to remove suspicion and "promote better understanding!"

Briefly, then, in the foregoing pages, an attempt has been made to show how a more interpretative or imaginative English criticism of Shakespeare's text as it actually stands might help towards an even better appreciation of Shakespeare's plays in France. This was written as though everything were straightforward. The truth is that it is not. The French mind reasons rather than imagines, and pays homage to Descartes, to Pascal and to Boileau.

Boileau is the epitome of French resistance to Shakespeare. Not only is his theory apposed to Shakespeare's practice, but the whole way in which he and other French critics have worked is different from that of their English counterparts. The French critic asks:

"What is a work of art?"

while the English critic is content to ask:

"What is criticism?".

There lies a basic difficulty. Judged strictly by French standards, Shakespeare did not create a single work of art. Not even his four main tragedies are free from blemishes. Thus it happens

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that, in France, works of art tend to conform to a theory of criticism, and, moreover, to a way of life. In England, on the other hand, it is the criticism which is adapted to encompass the object of it.

There is the possibility that if we attempt to work imaginatively, the French may grow yet more suspicious. The poet Shelley, in his "Defence of Poetry", wrote:

"Reason may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced ----- imagination ----- as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light".

The danger is that in trying to "colour" Shakespeare's thoughts, we may use a "light" which is not French.

However, the attempt is justifiable. Shakespeare criticism moves in waves. Each wave has the benefit of past experience, and no longer is Shakespeare repelled from the shores of France through ignorance or prejudice. In fact, he is being repelled less and less with each decade. If, as many believe, a new wave of interest in Shakespeare has formed in France since the end of the second World War, the effort of injecting some of Shakespeare's colours into the black and white of French reason ought to be made. If it does not succeed

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this time, it may be successful later, not in its entirety, but as a modifying influence helping to bring about the process of naturalizing into French literature the masterpieces of Shakespeare's work.

Shakespeare has never been more than a secondary influence in France. It seems unlikely now that we shall ever see in that quarter any reaction comparable to the impact of Shakespeare on Germany, which gave rise to the birth of comparative literature (1). When Shakespeare's work first arrived in France, it had to compete with a well-established literary tradition, which was not the case in Germany. However, a modifying influence is important, and to most people more desirable than a complete change of heart. It ~~will~~ best be arrived at by positive thought, for stagnation is ultimately more damaging to comparative literature even than positive thought which is erroneous.

It is worth remembering that the reputation of Shakespeare's plays in France has occasionally been kept alive merely by the French love of discussion for its own sake (2).

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1. J.Texte. "Etudes de littérature européenne".
1898. p.9.

2. See, for example, the scrapbook referred to in the footnote to p.29.

Chapter 3

Shakespeare and the French mind

Nationalism and internationalism are traversing so difficult a period that they are almost antithetical terms. There is a certain section of public opinion which feels that nationalism is bad, that patriotism ought to be abandoned, in fact, in favour of a more cosmopolitan fervour.

It would amount to a neglect of Shakespeare's heritage if that idea gained ground in England.

"The truth is that sane patriotism is not inconsistent with the international mind, and is as necessary today as ever it was. Provided that it does not descend to jingoism and war fever, patriotism is one of the finest influences for the betterment of the world. Patriotism induces willing sacrifice and unselfish co-operation more readily than any other loyalty".

Thus wrote Mr. C. Clark in 1932 (1). Shakespeare would have agreed with him, for he was a loyal patriot, a fact which helps to make his translation into French so much more difficult.

Nor can one discuss the literary difficulty involved without mentioning the political

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1. "Our British Heritage of Empire, Freedom and Literature".

one. When our French friends ask why we refuse to become a part of Europe, "Shakespeare" is the ultimate sum total of any answer that might be put forward.

Constantly, Shakespeare's work is concerned with the theme of Saint George and England. Although his patriotism is seen most clearly in his historical plays, with which we are not immediately concerned, it is present also in most of his other plays. Shakespeare, like most of the characters in his plays, though universally acclaimed, is English to the core. It is to us that he speaks and it is we who must respond, collectively and individually. Come on England, be true to yourself, he urges, and do not make a shameful conquest of yourself, you who were wont to conquer others (1). This national side of his genius is apparent everywhere. The poet and critic Swinburne described it as an:

"heroic vein of patriotism that runs like a thread of living fire through the world-wide range of his omnipresent spirit".

Agreeing with those sentiments, Professor G.Wilson-Knight thinks that "nationalism"(2) is one (3) of the "unities" of Shakespeare.

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1. "Richard II".Act II.sc.i.lines 65-66.
 2. Professor Wilson-Knight gives the following as the theme of his book "The Olive and the Sword"(1944): "Shakespeare's life-work might be characterised as expanding through a series of great plays, the one central legend of St.George and the Dragon".
 3. He quotes "tempests" as the other.

Shakespeare, then, is the national poet of England, a position he can never hope to gain in France. How could these lines be appreciated except by an Englishman, or in any language other than English?:

"This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
 This other Eden, demi-paradise,
 This fortress built by Nature for herself
 Against infection and the hand of war,
 This happy breed of men, this little world
 This precious stone set in the silver sea,
 Which serves it in the office of a wall
 Or as a moat defensive to a house,
 Against the envy of less happier lands,
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
 This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
 Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth,
 Renowned for their deeds as far from home, -
 For Christian service and true chivalry, -
 As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
 Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son:
 This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land"(1).

No Frenchman could be expected to interpret the spirit of England with such sympathetic grandeur. Nor is there any comparable passage in French

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1. "Richard II". Act II. sc. i. lines 40-57.

literature to show that he could have such feeling for his own country.

"This precious stone set in the silver sea" is a line not only of great alliterative beauty, but also one indicative of a conception of patriotism different from that of the French.

Matthew Arnold has been criticized for making judgments based on selected quotations, but he makes a most interesting and important point (1) in comparing the above lines from "Richard II", and William Wordsworth's:

"We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
Which Shakespeare spake, the faith and morals hold
Which Milton held -----" (2)

with

Victor Hugo's:

"Non, France, l'univers a besoin que tu vives!
Je le redis, la France est un besoin des hommes".

Arnold's analysis of the difference of spirit here was that the English lines are full of high poetry, and the French lines are not. In other words, poetry is more successful than purely rationalist thinking. Furthermore, the lines of Shakespeare and of

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1. "The French Play in London". In: "The Nineteenth Century". August 1879. pp.232-233.
2. "National Independence and Liberty". xvi.

Wordsworth could only have been written by natives of the country concerned. In the extract from Shakespeare we notice the emphasis on "this" (1), "this land", the one in which Shakespeare is writing, not just England, but "this England". Again, in Wordsworth's lines, there is a similar personal approach. "We must be free", wrote Wordsworth, not "England must be free".

Compared with those two, the approach of Hugo is that of an "outsider". He projects himself "outside" the question and then looks back at it. It is as though Hugo had summoned a meeting of nations to pass judgment on France and her position in the world pattern. The resulting conclusion is impersonal and unemotional, arrived at purely by intellectual effort. The question of patriotism is here reduced to the abstract and then simply solved.

Now that is typical of the French mind, and it is important for two reasons. First, as far as this work is concerned, it ~~means~~ that Shakespeare has been constantly approached in the same way, namely by an intellectualist philosophy making abstractions plus simple solutions.

Secondly, on a larger scale, the difference between the words of Shakespeare and Wordsworth on the one hand, and of Hugo on the other, is the same difference which exists at the present time

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1. Which occurs seventeen times in eighteen lines.

between the attitude of England and France respectively towards the international scene. England puts herself by a spirit of nationalism and empire at the centre of things. France, on the other hand, remains intellectually aloof on the perimeter of world affairs. When she pronounces judgment on herself, it is the clinical verdict of a doctor, not the subjective observation of a poet.

The same applies, also, to literature. At the darkest hour of our history, 1940, Professor G.Wilson-Knight collected together Shakespeare's patriotic poetry and published it under the title:

"This Sceptred Isle. Shakespeare's Message for England at War".

No similar collection of poetry from the work of any of the dramatists "representative" of French genius could have been issued.

This derives, then, from a different conception not only of nationalism, but also of nationalism in literature. Shakespeare has always represented and always will represent to the Frenchman an idea of literary genius entirely different from that of the classical tradition which formed his earliest training. Shakespeare is not only typical of England, as Racine and Molière are typical of France. He is England's

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mouthpiece, her champion now as he was three hundred and fifty years ago. The Frenchman who approaches Shakespeare has that difficulty to overcome, and, while it would be wrong at this stage to suggest that the French themselves are not aware of the problem, it is true to say that together with the barrier of language, the "Englishness" of Shakespeare is likely to be one of the most complex Shakespearean problems yet to be resolved abroad.

The outcome is twofold. First, constant dissection and analysis mar enjoyment. Secondly, as soon as one begins to judge a writer as complex as Shakespeare without understanding all his varied aspects, then no matter how unimportant may seem the part omitted, one runs the risk of meriting Coleridge's famous reproach (1). Coleridge, ~~it~~ will be remembered, accused some of Shakespeare's critics of filling their three-ounce phial at Niagara and then promptly declaring Niagara to be no more than that contained within the phial.

It must be emphasized that the French now miss Shakespeare's "Englishness" in the nature of things, and not, as they did in the past, through ignorance or prejudice. "Shakespeare and the French mind" has passed through these stages:

pre-Voltairean lack of knowledge was replaced by knowledge, accompanied by prejudice, and finally by knowledge without prejudice.

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1. S.T.Coleridge. Literary Criticism. Edited by J.W.Mackail. 1908. p.224.

Yet to be aware of a thing is not always to understand it, and the problems of language and "Englishness" remain, no matter how much knowledge of them has been gathered. Those are the reasons why Shakespeare has never "become a Frenchman".

Discussing the question of adopting foreign ideas, in his book "Amédée Pichot. A Romantic Prometheus" (1), Professor L. Bisson makes this pertinent comment:

"It is dangerous for a Frenchman to look for and find inspiration beyond the confines of his own country. One can borrow and even assimilate the ideas of a foreign race; the processes of the disciplined intellect know no boundaries. But sentiment and feeling are rooted in racial tradition; men cannot with equal facility learn to sing the alien songs or pipe the foreign tune".

This is inevitable, and no nation can give up its heritage in an attempt to reach a solution. Abstract ideas intellectually expressed have no nationality and may be easily translated from one country to another. As soon as personal feeling is involved, the same cannot be said. The theory of Trades Unionism is universal; the Tolpuddle Martyrs are part of English history. If we come to live by theories alone, then world government and world literature will

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1. 1942. p.xi.

be possible. But we shall have achieved a world not worth the having. It will prove much better to keep the "alien songs" and the "foreign tune", even at the expense of numerous literary and political problems. Writing on the subject of "Shakespeare and the French Mind" (1), Monsieur Joseph Delcourt said that it was:

"a mind of clear-cut lines"

and one

"to which Shakespeare's art could appear at best as a monstrous and shapeless jewel".

In that very incompatibility lies a clue to the greatness of each country.

To complete the picture further, what have we in England adopted of Racine or Molière? According to Maurice Bouchor (2), "Andromaque" and "Phèdre" were both played in translation in London about 1720, that is to say virtually before Shakespeare's name was known in France. More recently, an optimistic Belgian, writing about English bank-managers, said that they spend their leisure-hours pruning rose-bushes and reading Racine (3). One hopes that the first part is true, but one knows that the second is not true.

We should be indignant, and rightly

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1. In: "The Nineteenth Century and After". June 1916.
p.1264.

2. "Shakespeare au théâtre". 1895. p.143.

3. Quoted by Mr. Martin Turnell in the Preface to
"The Classical Moment". 1947.

so, if it were suggested that we have been philistines in this respect, and that we ought to read Racine rather than Shakespeare. But we must allow the French the same freedom. In speaking of "Shakespeare and France" we must remember that he is better appreciated in that country than Racine is in England (1). Some will draw conclusions from this, that it is to the credit of the French, or to the credit of Shakespeare that such is the case, or that Racine is too good or not good enough to bear translation, or that England is too insular to accept foreign ideas.

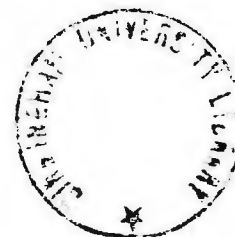
Mention of England's insularity is a reminder that the geographical question is not to be overlooked in discussing "Shakespeare and the French mind". Ronsard was aware of this insularity when Shakespeare was still young:

" ----- le beau pays anglais
Fils de Neptun, tout environné d'onde
Et séparé des malices du monde" (2).

In 1799, Novalis, in his "Fragments", had noticed that not only is England an island, but so is every Englishman.

Shakespeare, then, may be thought

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1. Despite the influence of French drama on English Restoration drama. See: Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian. "A History of English Literature". 1930. 1948 edition, pp.643-649.
 2. Oeuvres. I. 843.



of as an island within an island, requiring not only an intellectual effort, but a physical one also. The narrow strip of water which separates England and France prevented in former ages the easy intertraffic of ideas and influences between the two countries (1). At various times, France has enjoyed with Italy in particular, and with Spain also, a cultural relationship, political, linguistic as well as geographical, which has not been possible across the English Channel. France, linked to the rest of Europe, cannot be insular (2). We in this country have no option but to be insular, surrounded as we are by the sea.

The Sea, then, is a topic from which most of our great poets have drawn inspiration. It is a powerful force in Shakespeare, Byron, Wordsworth and Tennyson:

"Sunset and evening star
And one clear call for me,
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea" (3).

No one in England lives far from the sea. Shakespeare knew this, and constantly referred(4)

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1. As, indeed, it was sufficient to prevent a more material influx in 1940.
 2. Her only equivalent characteristic is a certain provincialism.
 3. From: "Crossing the Bar". (Tennyson).
 4. Some 260 times, in fact.

to it, always with powerful imagery (1).

If a French dramatist had brought blind Gloucester to the "cliff's edge", he would have concerned himself with the Duke's thoughts. Shakespeare gives pride of place to a description of the sea(2):

"Come on, sir, here's the place: -stand still -
How fearful

And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles:half-way down
Hangs one that gathers samphire-dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head:
The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,
Diminish'd to her cock, - her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight: the murmuring surge
That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,
Cannot be heard so high - I'll look no more;
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong".

Mention of Wordsworth and Tennyson
a few lines above reminds us that nature, "out-of-doors"

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1. Particularly in "Timon of Athens".
2. "King Lear". Act IV.sc.vi. Incidentally, the most successful translation of this passage into French is by Pierre Loti and Emile Vedel (1904), themselves seamen.

nature, that is, plays a large part in the works of Shakespeare and of most of our other poets. Not everyone will allow Wordsworth the title of naturalist, but he did love the area in which he was born. He does not take us to Africa or to the East; he loved his native soil too much for that. So we speak of him as one of our regional poets, of whom there is no French equivalent. As for Tennyson, he has the eye of the master:

"The sleepy pool above the dam,
The pool beneath it never still, --
The very air about the door
Made misty with the floating meal".

Shakespeare, like Keats, and unlike Baudelaire who saw autumn as coffin-making time (1), watches the seasons for their mists and mellow fruitfulness, for the icicles hanging by the wall. The nature in French poetry, on the other hand, is more frequently human nature, not green nature (2). Thus, Théodore de Banville compares the moon to a "frivole amante" (3). Shakespeare's description is:

"like to a silver bow New bent in heaven" (4).

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1. "Chant d'Automne": "Il me semble, bercé par ce choc monotone Qu'on cloue en grande hâte un cercueil quelque part -----".
2. Lamartine is the chief exception. Cp. his "L'Automne". (But even that is nearer to Baudelaire than to Keats). See also: Edmond Huguet. "Les métaphores et les comparaisons dans l'oeuvre de Victor Hugo". 1905.
3. "La Lune".
4. "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Lines 9-10 of the first scene.

French poets look inwards and thence out. English poets look outwards and thence in.

Thus in Baudelaire's "Déjà", man's mood is seen first and then connected to the sea. He cannot detach himself from its symbolic aspect. To Baudelaire the sea seems to:

"soutenir en elle et représenter par ses jeux, ses allures, ses colères et ses sourires, les humeurs, les angoisses et les extases de toutes les âmes qui ont vécu, qui vivent et qui vivront".

That is what lures the French poet to the sea. He does not return to it for Mr. John Masefield's reasons. Not for Baudelaire or Valéry (1) the "Sea Fever" of:

"I must down to the seas again, to the
lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to
steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song
and the white sails shaking
And a grey mist on the sea's face and a
grey dawn breaking".

Shakespeare, also, noticed details of nature akin to the winds and the grey mists:

"I know a bank whereon the wild-thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows

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1. Cp. "Le Cimetière Marin".

"Quite over-canopied with luxious woodbine
With sweet musk-rose and with eglantine"(1).

Now

those flowers do not grow in the same place or flower at the same time, but Shakespeare was aware of their existence, and that is important when comparing him with French poets, who generally give the impression that they have not this awareness.

Nature, the sea, insularity and nationalism are thus the first four points of this chapter on Shakespeare and the French mind.

The fifth, closely connected to nationalism, is a sense of Royalty. Shakespeare was nothing if not a loyal subject of his Royal family, and we notice his continued emphasis on it:

"This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle".

We know that many French people appreciate our monarchy, secretly if not openly (2). But to have one would not necessarily include the deep sense of royalty which is needed to appreciate Shakespeare fully. When Rouget de Lisle wrote his "La Marseillaise" in 1792, France had a monarch. She had ousted him from the Tuileries the previous year, and she executed him during the next(3). France's national anthem, therefore,

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1. A Midsummer Night's Dream". Act I.sc.ii.lines 249-252.
2. Even openly at times. (e.g.during the Royal visit to Paris in April 1957).
3. Louis XVI,executed in 1793.

unlike ours, is not a prayer for the well-being of a monarch, but springs from what proved to be the beginnings of the French Republic.

Those who feel that these five points are minor details ought to compare the speech of John of Gaunt (1) with a composition of Du Bartas (1544-1590) which was translated into English by a contemporary of Shakespeare, John Eliot (2). "Proofs" have been put forward that here is the source of Shakespeare's speech; Mr. J. W. Lever, for example, thinks it likely (3).

What is more important, however, from our point of view, is to appreciate the exact difference between the extract from Du Bartas and that from Shakespeare. If Shakespeare did copy from Du Bartas, then the difference is important as representing the alterations his genius thought fit to make. If he did not, then the difference is important because each composition represents what a poet of each country thought of his native land.

This is what Du Bartas, a minor poet, wrote:

"O mille et mille fois terre heureuse et féconde!

O perle de l'Europe! ô paradis du monde!

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1. See p.44.

2. In "Ortho-epia". 1593.

3. "Shakespeare Survey". vol.6. 1953. p.79.

France, je te salue, ô mère des guerriers,
 Qui jadis ont planté leurs triomphants lauriers
 Sur les rives d'Euphrate, et sanglanté leur glaive
 Où la torche du jour et se couche et se lève;
 Mère de tant d'ouvriers qui d'un hardi bonheur
 Tâchent comme obscurcir de nature l'honneur.
 Mère de tant d'esprits, qui de savoir épuisent
 Egypte, Grèce, Rome et sur les doctes luisent
 Comme au jaune éclatant sur les pâles couleurs;
 Sur les astres Phébus, et sa fleur sur les fleurs,
 Tes fleuves sont des mers, des provinces tes villes,
 Orgueilleuses en murs, non moins qu'en moeurs civiles;
 Ton terroir est fertile, et tempérés tes airs;
 Tu as pour bastions et deux monts et deux murs".

Perhaps it is wrong to compare
 Du Bartas with Shakespeare. Perhaps, on the other
 hand, it is significant that it is to a minor poet
 that we must turn for this French song of praise.

The differences between the above
 quotation and the speech of John of Gaunt are at once
 apparent:

First, there is nothing particularly "French"
 about the poem of Du Bartas. It is ethereal rather
 than earthy, an intellectual effort lacking in feeling,
 and very much in the strain of the cry of Victor Hugo
 quoted earlier (1).

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Secondly, there is no conception of sovereignty, no "royal throne" or "teeming womb of royal kings", no real nationalism, even.

Thirdly, there is no idea of insularity or of the sea. How ordinary seems the last line of the poem of Du Bartas:

"Bastillions four borne in thy bounds; two seas and mountains double" (John Eliot),

by the side of
Shakespeare's line:

"This precious stone set in the silver sea".

If those three differences of conception are of a minor nature, they have existed for an uncommonly long time. They were there in the work of a minor poet of the sixteenth century, and again in that of a major poet of the nineteenth. There is no reason to suppose that they do not exist even now.

A Frenchman who approaches Shakespeare, then, has first to realize that Shakespeare is not French, not even Spanish or Italian, not altogether universal, but to a very large extent: English. It was this simple fact which prevented Shakespeare from becoming known in France during his lifetime.

England at the beginning of the seventeenth century was, as far as France was concerned, an enemy, a miserable little island of

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Pym and Hampdens (1), a menace to the French desire for peace after weakening years of religious wars. France would have been aggrieved, moreover, to find anyone suggesting that she, the centre of the cultured world and chief "exporter" of manners and literary ideas, should begin to import ideas from a nation of "regicide barbarians". This feeling dyed so hard in the French mind that it was found expedient in some quarters during much of the nineteenth century to blame the influence of Shakespeare and his Jack Cade (2) for the events of 1789 onwards (3).

Writing in 1850, Amédée Pichot described himself like this:

"Moi, qui étais, et qui suis encore, suspect en France, d'une folle anglomanie" (4).

This last half-century, with its two World Wars, has done much to make repetition of such a statement impossible.

It may seem strange here to compare a play of Shakespeare's to the composition of our leading (5) newspaper, but it may well serve a

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1. John Pym (1584-1643). John Hampden (1594-1643).
 2. "King Henry VI" (part 2).
 3. In his book "French Personalities and Problems" (1946.p.38), Professor D.W.Brogan shows how the French believe that freemasonry was England's invention and that it helped to bring about the French Revolution.
 4. Quoted by Professor L. Bisson: "Amédée Pichot. A Romantic Prometheus". 1942. p.xi.
 5. By status, not by statistics.

useful purpose. We recall that "The Times":

- a. Fills its front page with advertisements.
- b. Puts its most important news in the centre pages, together with a "fourth leader" in lighter vein.
- c. Emphasizes England's heritage and natural beauty.
- d. Attaches importance to sport.

A Shakespeare play is very similar to "The Times" in those respects. Shakespeare also:

- a. Fills his early scenes with "advertisements".
- b. Puts his important ideas into the centre scenes, with a "fourth leader" for comic relief (1).
- c. Emphasizes England's heritage and natural beauty.
- d. Attaches importance to sport (2).

Signor Benedetto Croce and Monsieur Maurice Maeterlinck have both ascribed the insufficiency of French appreciation of Shakespeare to a combination of classical tradition and intellectualist philosophy. While not for a moment denying the truth of that assertion, many will feel that even if those two obstacles could be removed, the two here put forward,

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1. See Chapter 10 for a discussion of the French and Shakespeare's comedy, and Chapter 8 for a study of the comedy in Shakespeare's tragedy.
2. Caroline Spurgeon. "Shakespeare's Imagery". 1935.

first language, and now "Englishness", would still remain.

To reduce the matter to simple terms, therefore, we suggest that when the majority of Frenchmen are able fully to understand "The Times", then will they understand Shakespeare.

Perhaps, however, it is television rather than journalism which finally predominates. Recently (1) the French television service brought many more people into contact with the work of Shakespeare through its productions of some of his plays. Productions like these by-pass all that the critics can say on the "theory and practice" of French appreciation of Shakespeare's work, and strike a most hopeful note on which to conclude this chapter.

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1. During the Royal visit to France in April 1957.

Chapter 4

Shakespeare: comedian or tragedian?

In this, the last of the introductory chapters prior to separate discussions of Shakespeare's tragedy in France and Shakespeare's comedy in France, we are to consider the two genres in order to see how in France the audience is still not sure whether Shakespeare was a comedian or a tragedian.

When Heminge and Condell decided to divide the works of Shakespeare into the three ill-defined groups of histories, tragedies and comedies, they could have had no idea that their subsequent classification was to prove yet another stumbling-block in the way of the French approach to Shakespeare. Who could be this strange dramatist from across the sea who had written, apparently, the history of "Julius Caesar", the tragedy of "Richard II" and the comedy of "The Merchant of Venice" (1).

That question prompts several thoughts. The difference between Shakespeare's tragedy and French classical tragedy, and the difference between Shakespeare's comedy and French classical

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1. The three similar plays are described thus in the First Folio (1623).

comedy, will each require separate chapters under the appropriate heading in the main body of the work to follow. The two topics for discussion now are: first, why it should be necessary to have these separate headings of "Tragedy" and "Comedy" (leaving the Histories on one side), and, second, what rank does each genre hold in France and in England.

In associating Shakespeare with a country which tends to refer to tragedy and to comedy separately rather than to drama as a whole(1), we easily find several reasons why it is necessary to speak of Shakespeare's comedy and Shakespeare's tragedy rather than of Shakespeare generally.

The first reason is that the French, even today, and largely as a result of the activities of the Romantics, regard Shakespeare primarily as a writer of tragedies. Shakespeare, in fact, has become firmly wedged in the door of French understanding, his tragedy on their side, his comedy on ours. An analysis of French comment on Shakespeare will reveal a dozen mentions of "Othello" and "Macbeth" for every one of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "As You Like It".

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1. Thus "Shakespeare and Racine" and "Shakespeare and Molière" appear more often as titles than does "Shakespeare and French drama".

It is interesting to try and discover why Shakespeare's tragedy has been more easily appreciated in France than his comedy.

Mr. Richard David, writing on "Shakespeare's comedies and the modern stage" (1), has a useful distinction between the two genres which helps towards a solution:

"Tragedy is large in gesture and effect, and even when its overtones are lost and the subsidiary strokes bungled, its main import can hardly be missed. Comedy depends much more on detail, on delicate adjustments of balance and of contrast; it seeks to reproduce the climate rather than the actual predicaments of real life and its method is rather allusiveness than direct presentation. Comedy has more and finer points of attachment to the world in which it is composed than has tragedy. ----- Tragedy", concludes Mr. David, "can be understood in the original as it were, even by those unacquainted with the tongue; whereas comedy, to be appreciated by a modern audience must undergo some degree of translation into modern terms".

While this view may not be reconcilable with the respective popularity of Racine and Molière in England, most critics will agree with it as far as English-French traffic is concerned, in all except its final qualification, where one prefers to tread warily over "some degree of translation".

1. "Shakespeare Survey". vol.4. 1951.

By whom, to what extent, would it really help? Those are three of the questions which spring to mind at once. To answer the last of the three, we feel that there is nothing to be gained. In its application to the question of "Shakespeare and France", it is not the Elizabethan nature of Shakespeare's comedy which baffles the French critics so much as the English nature of it. The French, not knowing what to expect, laugh at Shakespeare's comedy only on their second acquaintance with it. Due to the very nature of Shakespeare-going in France, however, this second audition rarely takes place.

As yet, it has been left, as we might expect, to a Frenchman to interpret English comedy and humour to the French (1). One need not add that Professor Cazamian's work is a very fine contribution to Anglo-French comparative literature, but, like other professors in France, he cannot in the nature of things commune in English fellow-feeling with the Bottoms, the Dogberrys and the Falstaffs. These constitute the "climate" that Mr. David wrote about, the English inner climate no less complex to a foreign observer than its outer one. Here we are not faced with powers and passions. We are in the company of tinkers and weavers, fools and clowns, not of mad

1. Professor Louis Cazamian. "The Development of English Humour". 1952.

kings and misguided generals.

Thus we arrive at the question of the "universality" of Shakespeare, as complex a literary problem as has ever arisen. "Universal" is, in our work, used with the much reduced meaning of Anglo-French understanding. In that respect, a Frenchman, Paul Stapfer, sums up the situation neatly (1):

"Oui, cela est certain, la tragédie, vivant dans un monde plus ou moins idéal, vague et conventionnel, se fait aisément comprendre partout, au lieu que la comédie, puisant généralement ses sujets dans la réalité contemporains et locale, devient vite inintelligible pour les autres âges et les autres peuples".

The first thing to decide is whether or not the statement when applied to "Shakespeare and France" is as true now as it was in 1887. With only slight qualification (2), the statement is still applicable.

But while accepting the idea of the "universality" of Shakespeare's tragedies compared with the "localness" of his comedies, we ought not thereby to reduce these latter to the rank of farcical interludes. They are not, and even in

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1. "Molière et Shakespeare". 1887. 1905 edition:p.23

2. Stapfer, also, qualified his remark almost immediately by reference to Molière.

France, they find critics with novel interpretations as to their greatness. Later on, for instance, in chapter 14, it will be seen that one of Shakespeare's comedies, "The Taming of the Shrew", is generally better understood in France than in England, if not for the right motives, and comes comparatively close to rivalling the four great tragedies in popularity.

Monsieur Michel Saint-Denis, who is in an excellent position to judge (1), thinks that, theatrically at any rate, Molière and Marivaux have ensured a smoother path for the interpretation of Shakespeare's comedies than is possible for his tragedies. These, he thinks, are ruined by the absolute uniformity of voice with which they are declaimed. Certainly the success of Monsieur Saint-Denis's production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream"(2) in many French and Swiss towns since 1952 has borne out his contention.

Generally, however, it is to his tragedies that French critics refer when they talk of Shakespeare. There are reasons why this should be so in any country. Tragedy reaches us through our deepest feelings, feelings of love, sympathy, anger, hatred and horror, which are universal. Comedy, on the other

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1. A Frenchman, he was for many years, until 1952, director of the Old Vic.

2. See chapter 15.

hand, appeals to the intellect, which, as we have seen to a certain extent in the preceding chapters, differs from country to country.

It was Mr. St. John Ervine who illustrated (1) this point by showing how, for instance, the "Trojan Women" of Euripides moves a modern audience as profoundly as it moved the ancient Greeks, and was as topical after the first and second World Wars as it was when Troy was besieged. By contrast, an audience composed of Arabs, Balts, Chinese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Italians, Indians and Moors would receive "Charley's Aunt" with mixed feelings, ranging from hilarity to boredom and incomprehension.

That is true for any country or countries. As it affects the question of "Shakespeare and France", there are more particular reasons why it should be so. Perhaps the most important is that while English literature is strong in comedy, which English taste prefers to tragedy, it is tragedy which is thought to be the strongpoint of French literature(2), and which French taste holds in the highest esteem.

It appears, in fact, that as far as

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1. In an article called "Our Changing Entertainments" which appeared in "Homes and Gardens". January 1955.
2. With the exception of Molière, obviously.

generalizations are reliable, the French are happy outside the theatre and sad once inside, while of the English the reverse is true. The theatre critic of "Le Monde" writing in December 1951 of a production of Monsieur Jules Supervielle's translation of "As You Like It" (1935), seems to have sensed that basic difference:

"Les spectateurs auxquels Shakespeare destinait sa comédie voulaient, avant tout, être charmés. Ceux d'aujourd'hui ont-ils le même désir?".

The answer, broadly speaking, is "Yes" in England, "No" in France.

From this point of view it is useful to recall John Dryden's definition of a play(1):

" ----- a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind".

Now in England, the emphasis generally falls on "delight", whereas in France it tends to fall on "instruction". Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that French delight is of a different nature from ours.

This difference was underlined by Alexandre Büchner (2) when he said that comedy created

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1, In his essay "Of Dramatick Poesie". 1668.

2. "Les Comédies de Shakespeare". 1865. p.20.

little feeling of "satisfaction intérieure" in the French mind. English mental satisfaction, on the other hand, is generally to be found on a less sombre level. In direct contrast to that of our French neighbours, it consists not of tragedy but of comedy, moreover of a "cakes and ale" (1) variety.

This difference was actually mirrored centuries ago in a medieval proverb which suggests that the English race is the best at weeping and the worst at laughing (2). That is a half-truth, like the remark of Alexandre Büchner in his book quoted on the previous page:

"La qualité fondamentale du théâtre anglais, c'est la tristesse" (3).

It is, but from there the author ought to have gone on to show how much of our finest humour springs from that very sadness, both in the theatre and in the novel, in Shakespeare and in Dickens, Hardy, Thackeray and others.

The rivalry between the comic and the tragic genres is in itself a great point at issue in the relationship between Shakespeare and the French. It began really as a social difference. Barbarians and cultured citizens were both present in France when we

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1. "Twelfth Night". Act II. sc. iii: "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale".
2. "Anglica gens est optima flens et pessima ridens".
3. p.13.

were only "barbarians". Later, when crowds from all classes of English "barbarians" were crowding into the "Globe" to see anything which Shakespeare offered them (1), there was no comparable cult of theatre-going in France. With few exceptions, the cultured went to the legitimate theatre to see a tragedy, while the others went to the local fair to see one of the very popular "parades". This early distinction between the two genres most probably accounts for the later spate of small theatres in Paris which specialize in comedy of the revue pattern.

The gap between cultured and barbarian, once established, was more easily widened than closed. The "parades" arose because an autocratic monarch refused to incorporate low comedy into the legitimate theatre (2). This fact, coupled to the name of Richelieu, the founding of the Académie Française and the gradual triumph of the essentially Latin is one of the chief reasons why Shakespeare's passage into France has been anything but smooth. Before 1635 he might have been adopted quite easily,

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1. Is this not significant in helping to form an honest judgment of Shakespeare? Human nature cannot have altered radically.
2. Even today, the "Comédie-Française", a national theatre in every sense of the word, and of which we have as yet no equivalent, presents an exhibition of "authorized" drama.

but after that date the possibility of Shakespeare's plays penetrating into France uncriticized, lessened.

In fact, the person asked to pinpoint the one event which had done more than any other to guarantee French resistance to Shakespeare would be justified in quoting the foundation of the Académie Française and all that it implies. It implies order, centralized authority, a national front and a belief in the benefit of an Academy at the head of a nation's literature. The French order such institutions with pomp and ceremony. They have an Academy for practically every subject, except that they lack the one we in England are most proud of, a political one.

When it was seen eventually that Shakespeare wrote both comedies and tragedies, no one quite knew whether to produce them on the tragic or on the comic stage. Furthermore, even if one could manage to separate the genres, Shakespearean tragedy and Shakespearean comedy were totally unlike the French idea of what tragedy and comedy ought to be.

Greater than this, however, was the difficulty of being able to separate the genres, which the French have always insisted upon. The three plays quoted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter show how indifferently the Folio editors labelled Shakespeare's plays, and even if they had refrained

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from so doing, the French would have been no less baffled when they came to the text itself. The clinking of tankards and a song about King Stephen's breeches in a tragedy of love (1)? A king with a madman and a Fool at the climax of what is thought by many to be the greatest of English tragedies(2)? Such a mixture(more apparent than real) of the genres is still a matter for serious debate among the majority of French commentators on Shakespeare.

Here (3), Horace Walpole's aphorism deserves to be studied. Walpole's observation that:

"this world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel" (4)

is pertinent in this present work for two reasons:

First, Walpole, like many Englishmen of his day, thought as a Frenchman.

Secondly, it shows very well the "French" mind at work:an abstraction plus a simple solution(5).

The

solution offers black or white, but no intermediate

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1. "Othello".Act II.sc.iii.Iago:"King Stephen was a worthy peer, His breeches cost him but a crown",etc. See pp.172-175.
 2. "King Lear".Act III.sc.iv.See pp.160-164.
 3. Chapter 8 and chapter 13 will discuss in greater detail the mixing of the genres in Shakespeare's plays.
 4. Written in a letter to the Countess of Upper Ossory. 16th.August 1776.
 5. Although,on the contrary,one of France's leading contemporary philosophers,Jean-Paul Sartre,does not accept abstractions at all.

shades of grey. It is the type of phrase with which one vaguely agrees without feeling entirely satisfied.

The first part in particular requires amendment. Many thoughtful people today will not find the results of their thinking comic. That is because feeling intrudes on thought.

This, however, is the thought-process Walpole had in mind: think of life as it might be; think of life as it is; think of the difference between the two. The result is ludicrous, therefore comic. Nowhere do the feelings come into this thought which is a purely intellectual process. The French head and heart have a tendency to work separately rather than together. Sympathetic laughter, the keynote of Shakespeare's comedy and of English comedy in general, in which head and heart join forces, is excluded by Walpole's remark. It leaves room only for satire, the keynote of French comedy generally.

Writing on this point, Mr. John Palmer shows(1) how the French keep their heads in a comedy and lose their hearts in a tragedy. That is the essence of Walpole's dictum, of which Mr. Palmer justly says(2):

"It denies that a man may laugh and be sorry at the same time, relish the humour of his own distresses, deride the fool and yet acknowledge a

1. "Comic Characters of Shakespeare". 1946. p.vii.

2. Ibid. p.viii.

companionship in his folly, smile at extravagances to which he is himself as liable as their victim, be diverted by the exhibition of a weakness and yet retain a lively sympathy for the weakling, delight in the misadventure of a rascal and yet recognize him for a kindred spirit".

Now all of those characteristics of head and heart working together are un-French, and all are to be found in Shakespeare (1).

It is a question of the French critical faculty (that is, of the head) on the one hand, and our "sporting spirit" (that is, of the heart) on the other. To echo Monsieur Michel Saint-Denis again:

"L'auditoire anglais manque d'esprit critique, mais constitue 'un public éminement théâtral' dans la majorité des cas".

Presumably this "compliment" means that we in this country adopt a sporting attitude to the plays we are offered, a characteristic almost unknown in France. Those who approach the question of "Shakespeare and France", therefore, have this to bear constantly in mind, namely that Shakespeare, not a "popular" dramatist in France (3) to begin with, is

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1. In the character of Falstaff, for example.

2. "La revue théâtrale". 1954.

3. Depending on one's own definition of "popular", perhaps not even in England.

furthermore judged by a critical faculty second to none.

This chapter, which we now conclude, forms something in the nature of a junction. Earlier we discussed the broader issues of Shakespeare as a whole, his relationship to the French written language, to French criticism and to the French mind. But in this chapter, we set out to draw together those broader issues, to make the distinction between comedy and tragedy and to demonstrate that not only does English comedy differ from French comedy, and English tragedy from French tragedy, but that the emphasis placed on each genre differs considerably from one country to the other. These assertions will give rise later to discussions such as those on the mixing of the genres (chapter 8 and chapter 13), on "Shakespeare and Racine" (chapter 6), and on "Shakespeare and Molière" (chapter 11), these two latter not in order to decide a question of merit, but because the names are closely linked together and so form a useful point of departure in discussing any aspect of French and English drama.

The next five chapters are to be devoted to some aspects of Shakespeare's tragedy in France, comedy coming second in that "Cinderella" role which she seems to bear with no ill-will.

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Part II

The French Approach
to Shakespeare's Tragedy

Chapter 5

Shakespeare and Corneille

The title "Shakespeare and Corneille" is a useful one with which to begin this particular section. Not only does it separate Corneille from Racine, a necessary separation in many respects, but it also provides an opportunity for some discussion of the state of tragedy in England and France during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This chapter will thus both prepare the ground for the one which follows (1) and, at the same time, substantiate an earlier assertion (2) that things might have been very different if Shakespeare could have established himself in France before 1635. Finally, it will show that Corneille and his public having ensured that Shakespeare did not so establish himself, the Corneille-type drama has persisted practically unchanged in France during several centuries.

Prior to about 1635, English and French drama were very much alike, a fact which is overlooked by many who see only the wide gap which developed between them at a later date. This is not to say that there was any conscious affinity between

1. "Shakespeare and Racine".

2. pp.72-73.

them at any time, but rather that at the end of the sixteenth century each had reached a similar stage in its development. Monsieur Jusserend, in his admirable study "Shakespeare en France sous l'Ancien Régime" (1) shows this very clearly, and not merely by revealing that Quinault, like Shakespeare, said that life was a farce and all the world a stage.

The position was this. English writers had created few tragedies as we understand them before Marlowe's "Tamburlaine" (2), for tragedy was a new genre little relished and little understood before Shakespeare crystallized English tragedy by following the lead Marlowe had given him. What little tragedy there was before then consisted more often than not of cruel comedy or tragi-comedy.

It is important to notice that the violence and the rough form of these early English plays, a little later to be castigated by French critics even though backed by the name of Shakespeare, were to be found no less in the medieval French theatre than in ours. That is to say that there was a French tragedy in France before Classical tragedy was known there. Like England, France also had her mystery and miracle plays (3), plays which were

1. 1898.

2. c.1587.

3. A type of drama springing from the Church, and hence common to all Christian countries. In France, the earliest Mystery was the "Jeu d'Adam" written about the middle of the twelfth century. The most important Miracle plays are the "Miracles de Notre Dame", forty in number, written in the second half of the fourteenth century.

frequently melodramatic and tragi-comic.

It was no doubt this similarity between our own and the French theatre which led Professor Raymond Lebègue to write a book with the title:

"La tragédie 'shakespearienne' en France au temps de Shakespeare" (1).

In it, the author points out that the violence associated with early English drama was rife in early French plays such as:

"Orbec-Oronte" (Du Monin, 1585); "Cammate" (Hays, 1598); "Amnon et Thamar", "Les Portugais Infortunés", "Albouin" (N. Chrestien, 1608); and the anonymous "Tragédie mahométiste" (1612), "Tragédie d'un More cruel" (1612), and "Axiane" (1613).

These plays, it will be noticed, were written approximately at the same period as Shakespeare's, and a study of any of them reveals vulgar passages comparable to those in a Shakespeare play. This is interesting because many of the adverse criticisms brought against Shakespeare by the French have been based on allegations of violence and vulgarity.

It was only about 1630-1635, says Professor Lebègue, that the Parisian stage became more

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1. "Revue des cours et conférences". 38e. année.
2e. série. no. 13. 15 juin 1937; no. 15. 15 juillet 1937;
no. 16. 30 juillet 1937.

moderate in its outlook. Montchrestien and Garnier, Normans like Corneille, had shown the way initially. The blinding of Sédécie, for instance, occurs off-stage in Garnier's "Les Juifves" (1). Now that Italian influence was bringing a higher standard of taste, Richelieu thought it time to put tragedy in France on a higher plane, a plane of "raison et gloire". The process of refinement was so thorough that:

"les transports d'Oreste dans 'l'Andromaque' de Racine, durent sembler une nouveauté" (2).

But it could so easily have developed otherwise. Alexandre Hardy (c.1570-1632) was sufficiently irregular to have become another Shakespeare, whom he resembled closely except in the depth of his genius. Like Shakespeare's, Hardy's life is veiled in mystery, the only definite knowledge we have of him being that he wrote specifically for a select company of actors, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and that he wrote some six hundred plays (3) in several forms, including pastoral, pseudo-operatic "pièces à machines", melodrama and tragi-comedy. The two latter types were difficult to distinguish one from the other, and if Hardy had managed to instil into them something

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1. 1583. So does the blinding of Gloucester (Act III. sc.vii) in most French adaptations and productions of "King Lear".
 2. R. Lebègue. op.cit.
 3. G. Brereton. "A Short History of French Literature". 1954. p.135. Estimates of those extant vary between 34 and 41.

of the poetry of Shakespeare, he might well have created a more Shakespeare-understanding form of tragedy than was developed by Corneille.

Nor was Hardy alone in his "Shakespearean" tendencies. A contemporary of his, Jean de Schelandre (c.1585-1635), who had lived in England under the patronage of James I, wrote in 1608 a free-form tragedy "Tyr et Sydon". A certain Ogier, in a preface to the play, written it will be noticed only twenty-eight years before "Le Cid" was first performed, and at the time that Shakespeare was at his zenith as a dramatist, not only supported the free-form of "Tyr et Sydon", but actually went so far as to speak out openly against the unities and against the separation of comedy and tragedy (1).

Yet by 1635-1636 the issue was virtually settled. Perhaps even so the change from free-form to classical-form tragedy was not so swift as the change in England which Marlowe began and Shakespeare completed. But the English change, if more swift, was in the due order of things and not nearly so radical as the difference between the plays quoted earlier (2) and the mature work of Corneille.

Thus the birth of French Classical Tragedy was perhaps the earliest appearance in France

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1. Joseph Delcourt. "Shakespeare and the French Mind". In: "The Nineteenth Century and After". June 1916. p.1262.
 2. p.81. From Professor Lebègue's book: "La tragédie 'shakespearienne' en France au temps de Shakespeare".

of "art for art's sake", however easily the mantle of regular tragedy may have fallen on a public desirous of order in all things. It was in fact an occasion where history did not provide what dramatic theory ordained (1). The striking change of attitude which made it possible for "Polyeucte" (1643) to follow so closely on the heels of "Clitandre" (1630) is not a mystery, but it must give cause for a certain amount of wonderment. In thirteen years (2) the fate of Shakespeare in France was virtually sealed.

"Clitandre" is so packed with incident that it becomes increasingly difficult as one reads to follow the plot. However, "Polyeucte" shows what a radical change took place. Incident is reduced now to a minimum, plot being sacrificed to internal character action. There is, some will say, a "twin plot": Pauline's love for Sévérus and her admiration for Polyeucte, but the two are so closely interwoven that they might easily rank as one, as do the opposing forces which beset Chimène. "Polyeucte" and "Le Cid", in fact, like much of the greatest tragedy in France after it, are cases put to arbitration. Corneille was the pioneer in this respect, a point which puts him as a technician on a slightly higher plane than Racine.

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1. Which was tragedy in the manner of Calderón, and ultimately of Shakespeare.
2. i.e. 1630-1643.

Before going on to see how Corneille decided finally to "follow" Seneca rather than Shakespeare, we may note how Corneille was originally "linked" to Elizabethan tragedy (1). This is important both intrinsically and also as a contrast to what was to follow. In the words of Albert Lacroix:

"Corneille a du Shakespeare"

and even though:

"le développement n'a pu se faire; l'époque et le lieu n'y étaient pas favorables" (2),

the

similarity remains.

It is relevant here to study the similarities between Shakespeare and Corneille, not to suggest that Shakespeare influenced Corneille (3), but because they represent the last evidence of a Shakespearean conception of tragedy in France.

A first feature to notice is that both dramatists were adept at the particular art of creating energetic political tragedies. "Polyeucte" and "Coriolanus", for instance, are both based on the history of the Roman Empire. There is, furthermore, a marked similarity between the thoughts of Horace when he murders Camille, and of Brutus when he murders

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1. Chapter 12 will discuss a similar link between Corneille and Elizabethan comedy. The link was not, in either case, a conscious one.
 2. "Histoire de l'influence de Shakespeare sur le théâtre français jusqu'à nos jours". 1856. p.xvii.
 3. Shakespeare's work was unknown to Corneille.

Caesar. Each commits murder in what each believes to be the interests of his native Rome:

"Et préfère du moins au souvenir d'un homme
Ce que doit ta naissance aux intérêts de
Rome"

implores Horace in the play of
the same name (1).

"I slew my best lover for the good of Rome"
echos Brutus (2).

Politics and history play the same
part in Corneille and Shakespeare as "business" does
in Balzac's "Comédie Humaine": where they do not lead
the action, they furnish a background.

We notice also that both "Horace"
and "Julius Caesar" are stories of human weakness, of
action rather than of meditation, in modern idiom
more extrovert than introvert. They are not purely
psychological abstractions, as the plays of Racine
tend to be. Both Horace and Brutus have battles of
conscience, but there is too much going on to give
that impression of absolute mental exhaustion which
Racinian analysis and confession generally cause in
his protagonists.

That is where Corneille's art is
more akin to Shakespeare's than is Racine's. In
Shakespeare's tragedy, Hamlet has a problem to solve,
but first there is a play to be performed(3). Othello
is in dire straits, but there is a cannikin to be
clinked (4). Lear is in search of shelter, but first

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1. Act IV.sc.v. lines 49-50.
2. "Julius Caesar". Act III.sc.ii.
3. Act III.sc.ii.
4. Act II.sc.iii.

he must say why the stars are seven (1). Only "Macbeth" of the four great tragedies fails to fall into line in that respect, which no doubt helps to explain its popularity in France. Otherwise there is usually something happening in Shakespeare's tragedy to prevent that purgatory of soul which afflicts Phèdre.

Likewise in Corneille, there is similar external action to be seen, if not to such a great extent. The battle of the Horaces and the Curiaces, reported at length if not actually seen, is one instance. The narrative is almost exciting at this point:

"Resté seul contre trois".

"One man against three". What Englishman could fail to respond to this more serious echo of "an hour to play and the last man in" (2). There is sympathy, perhaps, but sympathy for a physical difference of strength, not for a mental weakness.

In "Le Cid", also, there is fighting to be done. Even Don Gomès cannot restrain himself beyond Act I.sc.iv., where he strikes Don Diègue a blow. As Voltaire pointed out, this is the only such blow struck in French Classical tragedy, sufficient degradation in his opinion to warrant the

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1. Act I.sc. v.

2. Sir Henry Newbolt. "Vitaï Lampada".

title of tragi-comedy originally given to the play(1). When Hamlet and Laertes come to blows in Ophelia's grave, there is little wonder that Voltaire and others doubted the greatness of "Hamlet" as a tragedy.

As might be expected, Napoleon was quick to seize on the political energy of both Corneille and Shakespeare, and hoped to promote a drama combining the best qualities of each. With reference to that point, Monsieur Félicien Pascal quotes the following remark of Napoleon in his article "Shakespeare's introduction into France" (2):

"National interests, passion which has a political goal, the unfolding of a statesman's plans, and the revolutions which change the face of empires, here is the subject matter of tragedy".

Unfortunately for Napoleon, neither Corneille nor Shakespeare was left to add "Napoleon" to the ranks of "Horace", "Cinna", "Julius Caesar" and "Coriolanus".

Apart from "political energy", Corneille has other links with Shakespeare's tragedy.

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1. There seems to have been no specific reason for the alteration of the sub-title to "Tragédie". In the catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale, the first entry which bears "Tragédie" in place of "Tragi-comédie" is that referring to the edition of 1785.
2. Written for the "Fortnightly Review" of September 1919.

To give one example, he had Camille killed in "Horace", in the same way that Shakespeare thought fit to have a similar end for Cordelia in "King Lear". Addison objected to the death of Camille, just as Voltaire objected to that of Cordelia. The difference is that Shakespeare left his play to justify itself while Corneille had perforce to justify his "harsh and revolting scene" by saying that if the murder was committed on stage rather than in the wings, it was the fault of the actors concerned, not of the author.

Incidentally, this same part of "Horace" gave Voltaire cause for further wrath, for when, immediately after Camille's death, one Procule joins Horace for Act IV.sc.vi., Voltaire comments:

"D'où vient ce Procule? à quoi sert ce Procule, ce personnage subalterne qui n'a pas dit un mot jusqu'ici, c'est encore un très grand défaut".

No

wonder, then, that the French translators have always omitted, let us say, Fortinbras from the end of "Hamlet". Apparently a character must either be in the play from the beginning or not at all.

It is interesting to note that the more Voltaire's views on Corneille are set against his comments on Shakespeare, the more they are seen to be similar. Among the faults which Voltaire ascribes to both playwrights are:

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characters who have no place in the plot, long speeches, lack of rhetoric, bad style, intrusion of the author, and comedy mingled with horror (1).

Yet

in both cases the aim was the same: Voltaire was concerned with the purification of French Classical tragedy, of which he regarded Corneille as the creator and Shakespeare as the adversary.

It is further interesting to note that when the French Romantics were idolizing Shakespeare's tragedy and at the same time decrying the classical tradition, Corneille escaped much of the abuse expressed against Racine. Of the two reasons for this it was probably not because Corneille was worthy only of utter contempt, but because it was felt that he was in fact akin, if only distantly, to Shakespeare. The Romantics could have indicated, for instance, that in Corneille, as in English life, it is considered desirable that emotion is dominated by will-power, a victory for reason in the radical problem of what Pascal called "la guerre intestine" in man between reason and emotion.

However, the comparison between Corneille and Shakespeare cannot be drawn much closer

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1. Of the complex question of horror in drama, Théophile Gautier said: "En ôtant une brutalité, vous faites disparaître une délicatesse qui n'était sensible que par ce contraste". ("Histoire de l'Art Dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans". 3e.série.vol.3. p.287. 6 vols. 1858-1859).

on the "credit" side. This is where we begin to understand the force of Dr. Samuel Johnson's remark that:

"Corneille is to Shakespeare as a clipped hedge to a forest" (1).

Corneille was forced to listen not to the dictates of his own conscience, but to the dictates of the seventeenth-century French equivalent of "box-office". Like Shakespeare, unless human nature has altered radically, Corneille's chief preoccupation must have been a full theatre. In order to achieve this, he had to obey certain formalities which the French public was learning to insist upon in the construction of its drama.

He had first of all to concentrate on the form which his drama was to take, and this marks his breakaway from any thought he may have had of following a Shakespearean pattern of tragedy. Put briefly, Corneille's five great tragedies, or "sermons" as John Dryden called them:

"Le Cid", "Horace", "Cinna", "Polyeucte" and "Nicomède"

are analytical and develop in a circle, as Racine's do, although Corneille's circle is resolute, Racine's hesitant. By contrast, Shakespeare's quartet are synthetic and move in a straight line (2).

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1. In: "The Rambler". no.160.

2. For instance, Macbeth is told by the weird sisters of three titles which he is to acquire. Unlike a Racinian protagonist, he does not meditate at length on this news, but moves forward resolutely towards a fulfilment of the prophecy.

Thus, in his book "Shakespeare in Germany. 1740-1815" (1), Professor R. Pascal shows how J.E.Schlegel, who wrote neo-classical moralizing plays, but betrayed nevertheless an admiration for Shakespeare, saw the distinction between the two types. Schlegel thought that the two types of tragedy were:

- (a). the Aristotelian, which Corneille and Racine followed,
- and (b). the English, which is epitomized in Shakespeare.

The former is the representation of an action and is built round a principle or aim from which we may draw a moral lesson. Hence the construction is essential. On the other hand, the English type is the representation not so much of an action as of a number of characters involved in an action, from which we learn more about human nature. The construction may therefore be aimless and the plot may end fortuitously.

In the manner of the former type, Chimène and Rodrigue have a problem to solve at an early stage in "Le Cid", and the end of the play shows that the same problem still exists, only a compromise solution having been reached. In other words, we have come full circle round the fixed point of the "love or duty" conflict, to which the characters are subsidiary.

In "King Lear", for instance, the

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position is quite different. In Act I we learn how Lear divides up his kingdom, and then in the next four acts we follow the outcome of this unfortunate division, never coming back to the starting point, but going out and away from it, apparently aimlessly, as Shakespeare directs.

There is thus a difference of emphasis here. Corneille, while greatly improving on the other four acts, follows Seneca (1) in making Act V, during which occurs the "fait tragique", the climax of the play. One is not quite sure, for example, whether Polyeucte will opt for Pauline or for his religion until the end of the play. That is where the emphasis, the "fait tragique", lies.

In Shakespeare it is rather in the first act, which may be thought of as a postulate. Thus Hamlet sees his father's ghost and is pledged to revenge his death. Macbeth we know to have set off on the shortest route to the throne of Scotland. Lear divides his kingdom, alienating the affection of one daughter and putting the other two in league against him. Othello is shown as the man whom Iago is determined to bring low.

In Act I, then, all these decisions have been made and the play is virtually finished by French standards. If the tragic hero has made his decision, there is the denouement. In a Shakespeare tragedy, far from Act V being the summit

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1. And, nearer to him, Garnier.

of the play, it may well appear to the French as a disorderly, ill-composed section in which certain characters are hurriedly killed by the author.

Nor is this difference limited to the beginning and the end of the plays. The intermediary acts move differently. The progression in Corneille is a gradual upward curve prior to the final drop of the denouement. In Shakespeare the plot moves in waves, and there are sub-plots and asides to be carried on along with the main action, joining up with it briefly on occasion.

Corneille had all but eliminated the secondary plot, and where it did remain it was no more than a conflicting love-interest, such as that of Pauline for Sévérus and for Polyeucte, which is so closely bound to the main theme that it is impossible to conceive the latter without it (1).

So compact is Corneille's workmanship that, to the French, Shakespeare's must indeed seem by comparison the "monstrous jewel" that Monsieur Delcourt spoke of (2). It will be admitted even by one or two English critics that Shakespeare often brings in characters because they have not appeared for some time, and then dismisses them

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1. Corneille himself thought that a play should have only one plot. Presumably, therefore, he thought of "Polyeucte" as having only one.
 2. See p.50, note 1.

because they have no more to say. This, the French critics say, is incomprehensible. Why bring in Malcolm and Macduff to express their sorrows (1)? This slackens the pace of "Macbeth" and destroys at the same time the unity of place. Macduff ought to have gone at once to Macbeth's palace, there to indulge in a long soliloquy:

"De ma femme la mort me fait trembler de rage!
Et mes enfants! hélas! quelle horrible outrage!
Macbeth! tu dois trembler! Je suis plein d'une
horreur

Qui demande une revanche! Meurs enfin de terreur!"

No

more than a hundred lines in that strain would have been sufficient to put a French audience in exactly the right mood for the attack on Dunsinane.

Instead, Shakespeare gives us 280 "unnecessary" lines of Malcolm-Macduff, somewhere in England, and then a quick return to Scotland for the 81 "unnecessary" lines of Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene (2) and 114 "unnecessary" lines of narrative in the next two scenes before the Birnham Wood begins to move towards its goal.

Why introduce this narrative, asks the French critic. It is not the number of lines he dislikes: "Macbeth" is the shortest of Shakespeare's tragedies(3). It is the distribution of the lines that

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1. "Macbeth". Act IV.sc.iii.

2. Ibid. Act V.sc.i.

3. And of all Shakespeare's plays except "The Comedy of Errors".

he does not understand.

Corneille was a pioneer in that, in complete contrast to Shakespeare, he insisted on having what he called a "liaison des scènes" which ensures that all his characters both know each other and have business with each other. Now in three consecutive scenes (1) at the point in "Macbeth" which is under discussion, we find:

- (a). in the first, Lady Macduff and her son;
- (b). in the second, Macduff and Malcolm with a messenger;
- (c). in the third, Lady Macbeth, a doctor and a servant.

Of those three groups, the first has no contact in the play with either of the other two, and these two groups themselves are connected only slenderly by the few hours before Duncan's murder.

In Corneille's plays, a character or characters will form a liaison between consecutive scenes. In "Nicomède", for example, five out of the eight (2) characters are introduced in the first act, and are connected in the balanced progression:

2:3:5:3:2, thus:

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1. Act IV.sc.ii, sc.iii; Act V.sc.i.
 2. A small number compared with, let us say, the 22 characters of "Hamlet" or the 31 of "Antony and Cleopatra". (Neither figure includes the various soldiers, players, messengers, etc.). See also the context of note 1, p.121.

Scene 1. Nicomède.Laodice.

Scene 2. Nicomède.Laodice.Attale.

Scene 3. Nicomède.Laodice.Attale.Arsinoé.Cléone.

Scene 4. ----- Attale.Arsinoé.Cléone.

Scene 5. ----- Arsinoé.Cléone.

That

balance, to a French critic, is most important. Lyricism or picturesqueness will not compensate the lack of form so habitual among English playwrights. It is not so much what is said as the order and clarity of one's thoughts.

Corneille, then, was the architect who designed what the seventeenth-century French public demanded, and it was he who thus ensured that Classic simplicity was to be preferred in France to Elizabethan grandeur.

We may discuss, now that we know what actually happened, the theory of writing a tragedy. What ought one to expect from a tragic play?

This question is particularly interesting at a time when both English and French dramatists seem to be seeking a new form of tragedy. The position is very much as Corneille and Shakespeare found it when they arrived at their respective theatres. For the dramatist of today, the choice lies between a crystallization of what has gone before (in the manner of Shakespeare) and a completely new beginning (in the manner of Corneille). Looking

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backwards from the present day, we find four major seams to be worked:

the Greek theatre, the English Elizabethan theatre, the French seventeenth century theatre and the nineteenth century Scandinavian theatre (1).

In terms of present drama in France, how is Shakespeare likely to fare in the light of earlier knowledge?

Aristotle asked of a play only that it should have a beginning, a middle and an end, and should dwell on plot rather than on characters. But Corneille and Racine, in "going back" to their Greek "masters", decided to concentrate more on character, despite their attention to the construction of the plot. That particular emphasis, decided on by them, or possibly by their public, is likely to persist in France for a very long time to come.

Thus we discover that Maurice Maeterlinck's play "Aglavaine et Sélysette" (2) is directly in the strain of Corneille, for Sélysette has to make herself as worthy of Meleander as Aglavaine is, by dying, just as Polyeucte had earlier died to make himself worthy of Pauline. That is to say that Monsieur Maeterlinck, admirer and translator (3) of Shakespeare,

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1. See: Professor Allardyce Nicoll. "World Drama from Aeschylus to Anouilh". 1949.
 2. 1896. The copy of this date in the Bibliothèque Nationale bears the inscription: "5e. édition".
 3. "'Macbeth'. Traduction nouvelle". In: "L'Illustration Théâtrale". Paris. le 28. août. 1909.

turned, nevertheless, to seventeenth century France(1) for his inspiration.

As recently as 1955, Henri de Montherlant showed in his play "Port-Royal" how little times have changed. Set in a classical mould, there is virtually no external action in "Port-Royal" apart from the arrival of the Archbishop and the expulsion of those who refuse to comply with the dogma. The drama is enacted in the minds of the Archbishop and of the nuns. The character of Soeur Angélique recalls to us constantly Jansenist tragedy, and what little "comedy" there is in the play as a whole is bitter in tone. With "Aglavaine et Sélysette", "Port-Royal" marks the continuity of a strain almost unknown in England. Only "Othello" could be compared to them, and then in general idea rather than in form or detail.

Broadly speaking, then, we may say that French tragedy of the future is likely to be based to some extent on Corneille. This will prove better than a completely new form: let the French go on growing and trimming their "clipped hedges" while we continue to produce our "native forests" (2).

Otherwise, as Voltaire saw, one may, in altering one's literature, alter one's way of life as well.

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1. As well as the Symbolists who were his contemporaries. Another writer of those times to blend symbolism and "Shakespeareanism" in his plays was Paul Claudel. Cp. "L'Annonce faite à Marie" (1912), "Tête d'or" (1890) and "Partage de Midi" (1906).
 2. See p.91.

What is important for the present, and what immediately concerns the end of this chapter, is to see how Shakespeare is likely to have modified or is likely to modify in the future the Cornelian pattern of tragedy. The general impression is that Shakespeare may have had in this respect a "widening" or "eclectic" effect on the construction of French tragedy. It is now apparent, for example, that attention to Shakespeare has made impossible in France a repetition of the circumstances which led Corneille to offer various excuses for parts of his work.

In his tragedy "Pompée", for instance, the whole of the action, situated in the palace of Ptolomée at Alexandria, takes place in a vestibule common to all apartments. This immediately arouses English suspicions, but Corneille has a reassuring word of advice. This unity of place, he tells us, is quite realistic:

"pourvu qu'on se détache de la vérité historique".

Now Shakespeare was not hostile to the idea of making history fit his drama, and would not have questioned the wisdom of turning the pagan Leir into a Christian Lear. But he would not make excuses for any alterations he might make.

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We recall that Amédée Pichot asked (1) without resorting to invective whether it was a crime to suggest that French history was not classical any more than were its heroes of old. Albert Lacroix joined Pichot in regretting (2) what he called conventional and convenient drama.

There are grounds for believing this in view of the excuses which Corneille had to make from time to time, like this further one (3), occasioned by the fact that Cleopatra, in the corridor, opens the second act, while Cornélie, in the corridor, opens the fifth. Corneille admits that their speeches would have been delivered more appropriately in their respective rooms:

"mais l'impatience de la curiosité féminine les en peut faire sortir".

Only if Corneille intended that remark to be ironical could it possibly be construed as Shakespearean.

Should truth be a prerequisite of drama? One could go on to discuss this at great length. It depends what we mean by "truth" and what we mean by

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1. According to Professor L. Bisson's biography of Pichot. 1942. pp.243-244.
2. "Histoire de l'Influence de Shakespeare sur le Théâtre Français jusqu'à nos jours". 1856. p.xix.
3. Again in "Pompée".

"drama". There are many definitions of drama, ranging from:

"science in the flesh" (1)

to:

"life upon the larger scale ----- hungry for the infinite" (2).

Shakespeare has no specific definition of drama, but if he has had any "unity" for the French, it is that art, including drama, based on Nature (3), which is synonymous with Truth, may be as great as or greater than that conceived for its own sake. On this point, Seneca said that:

"all art is but imitation of Nature".

Shakespeare has taught us that it is idle to praise him (and this applies equally to Molière) for basing his plays on Nature: he would have been astonished to find that there was any other way.

He would no doubt have been surprised, also, to find that France has not yet produced the form of an "Antony and Cleopatra", with its fourth act of fifteen scenes (of which scene xi has only five lines) and its fifth act, by contrast, of two scenes only (the final one 437 lines in length). It is strange that "Antony and Cleopatra", which moves

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1. Jean Cocteau. "Le Rappel à l'Ordre". p.7.
2. E.B.Browning. "Aurora Leigh". Bk.4.line 1151.
3. That is, on human nature.

not only out into the corridor, but from one country to another, has been among the best-liked plays of Shakespeare in France (1).

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that Shakespeare has shown that the only real unity is one of interest (2), and provided that this be well maintained, questions of time and place are irrelevant. Thus, "Antony and Cleopatra" is universally acclaimed, while "Pompée" has remained in the dusty corridor where it was first set. Yet we must remember that Henri de Montherlant's "Port-Royal" (1955) observes all three unities and is constructed just as "Pompée" was.

The lesson that the unities did not constitute the only method of constructing a play, has probably been, then, Shakespeare's greatest single contribution to the technique of French drama. He has widened that technique to include not only one side of one character confronted by one particular set of circumstances on one particular day, but also

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1. Textually, at least. Conversely, it is remarkable that "The Tempest", the play of Shakespeare's which comes nearest to "obeying" the unities, has never aroused any special enthusiasm in France. See also note 1, p.112..
 2. Alfred de Vigny proclaimed this in 1829. ("Lettre à Lord XXX sur la soirée du 24 octobre 1829, et sur un système dramatique"). See note 1, p.4.

various sides of all sorts of characters in divers circumstances during different periods of their lives. Some French critics admit now that twenty-four hours is not sufficient to allow of full dramatic development. Much might occur in three months that cannot possibly take place between sunrise and sunset. Why should three hours represent twenty-four? Why not thirty-six hours, or a week, or a month? Why talk of logic when the whole art consists of asking several hundred people in one half of a hall to believe that what is taking place in the other half is actually real?

Those are some of the questions which Shakespeare has prompted. This is on a broad basis. As far as details of technique are concerned, Shakespeare has again one or two suggestions to make to Corneille and his disciples.

The first, and probably the most important, is that characters who speak with passion may yet be as controlled as those who utter artificial verses, or who are the masters of themselves as of their universe and so say nothing at all. Stendhal later called Corneille's characters "egoists" because once having taken a particular stand they will overcome all obstacles in their path. It is ironical that Turgenev used this very word "egoist" when he spoke of Hamlet as one of the two basic types of humanity (1). If, as a result of such assessments one were to premise that:

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1. Don Quixote, altruist, being the other.

"Corneille's characters are egoists, Hamlet is an egoist, therefore Corneille could have created Hamlet"

one would be wrong. Racine might have created a female Hamlet, but Corneille could not have produced one of either sex. He lacked the passion which would have made Rodrigue hesitate before killing his future father-in-law, in the way that Hamlet hesitates before eventually disposing of his uncle (and then not by design so much as in the heat of the moment).

Hippolyte Taine, in his "Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise" showed that Corneille's use of the heroic was paralleled by Shakespeare's use of the passionate. This means that Corneille's characters are idealized heroes and heroines, while Shakespeare's are individual men and women. Thus Corneille's:

"Et j'ai trouvé l'adresse, en lui faisant la cour,
De relever mon sort sur les ailes d'Amour" (1)

sounds

stereotyped to an English ear, despite the quality of "adresse" and "amour", while Shakespeare's:

"To both these sisters have I sworn my love;
Each jealous of the other, as the stung are of
the adder" (2),

despite its graphic appeal, is no doubt unrefined to a French ear.

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1. "Médée". Act I.sc.i.lines 43-44.

2. Edmund in "King Lear". Act V.sc.i.

Or we may compare the underlying resolution of:

"Je le ferais encor si j'avais à le faire" (1)
with

Macbeth's hesitant:

"But wherefore could I not pronounce 'Amen'?" (2).
Or,

again, let us take Nicomède's considered:

"Un véritable roi n'est ni mari ni père;
Il regarde son trône, et rien de plus" (3)
(which

is no doubt sublime but inaccurate) and compare it with Lear's passionate:

"Ay, every inch a king!" (4).

Reasoning in the French quotations is balanced in each case by feeling in the English ones. When Maurice Maeterlinck, in his "Aglavaine et Sélysette" mentioned earlier in this chapter, allows Sélysette's grief to show, he displays a Shakespearean trait in an otherwise Cornelian tragedy. This is not to say that the French will or ought to or could give up their love of what Francisque Sarcey called (5):

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1. "Le Cid". Act III.sc.iv.line 30.
 2. "Macbeth".Act II. sc.ii.
 3. "Nicomède". Act IV.sc.iii.lines 14-15.
 4. "King Lear". Act IV.sc.vi.
 5. "Quarante ans de théâtre". vol.3. 1900. p.15.

" (ces) alexandrins superbes qui ébranlent l'âme et l'emplissent d'une joie généreuse".

Thus the following are lines of great beauty to the French:

"Tu t'es, en m'offensant, montré digne de moi;
Je me dois, par ta mort, montrer digne de toi" (1).

But with Shakespeare, a line may be of great beauty even though it does not take the form of an alexandrine:

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day"(2).

Maurice Maeterlinck sensed the beauty of that in his poetical prose translation (3):

"Demain, puis demain, puis demain, rampe à
petits pas de jour en jour -----"

Shakespeare's are ordinary words in ordinary lines, but of great intrinsic beauty nevertheless.

"Ordinary words" serves as a reminder that Shakespeare has been a counterbalance to the "purge" of the noble style. When Laodice says to Nicomède:

"Vous n'avez en ces lieux que deux bras
comme un autre" (4)

Voltaire classed the line

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1. "Le Cid". Act III. sc. iv. lines 83-84.

2. "Macbeth". Act V. sc. v.

3. 1909.

4. "Nicomède". Act I. sc. i. line 92.

as one from low comedy too often found mingled with the noble style. Voltaire also thought that the words "prostitution", "impudicité" and "fille abandonnée aux soldats" to be found in Corneille's "Théodore. Vierge et Martyre. Tragédie Chrétienne" rendered the play vulgar and disgusting. There is no wonder, then, that he thought of Shakespeare as a "génie barbare". The salient point, as we noted on page 30, is that he was able to catch even a glimpse of Shakespeare's genius through what must have seemed to him an excess of vulgarity.

Finally, Shakespeare has shown that the love-interest which tends to dominate French tragedy may be used successfully as an accessory and not only as a mainspring. Corneille's tragedy exists because of the love of Chimène and Rodrigue for each other, of Pauline for Sévérus and Polyeucte, and theirs for Pauline. Without these respective loves the plays could not exist. Only "Othello" of Shakespeare's four main tragedies is based solely on love, which has no doubt made itself apparent to the French public, for "Othello" is one of the most frequently acted of Shakespeare's plays in France. In "Macbeth", "King Lear" and "Hamlet" love assumes a subsidiary role. In French adaptations this has not always been the case. In the adaptation by Duhomme and Sauvage (1)

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1. 1844.

of "King Lear", for example, the love of Edmund for Goneril and for Regan becomes the centrepiece of the play.

Despite the modifications we have mentioned, however, Shakespeare and the tragedy which Corneille evolved remain, in 1957 as in 1636, separate one from the other. Perhaps the "clipped hedge" and the "forest" that Dr. Johnson spoke about (1) will always remain incompatible.

1. See p.91.

Chapter 6

Shakespeare and Racine

It was Mr. Lytton Strachey who pointed out that:

"Englishmen have always loved Molière. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that they have always detested Racine" (1).

Nor is the basic reason difficult to discover. With Corneille, as was suggested in the previous chapter, there is some feeling at least of a link with English tragedy, a link which is absent from the works of Racine (2). Victor Hugo was probably correct in saying in the Preface to "Cromwell" that Shakespeare united the best of Corneille, Molière and Beaumarchais, not mentioning Racine (3).

In this chapter, we shall discuss

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1. "Landmarks in French Literature". 1912. p. 89. The author does not include himself in this general "detestation" of Racine. On the contrary, he thinks, and many will agree with him, that the plays of Racine are more successful as "technical theatre" than the majority of Shakespeare's plays.
 2. Racine and Shakespeare have at least one detail in common: each owed something to Plutarch, Racine part of his "Mithridate", and Shakespeare part of his "Coriolanus", "Julius Caesar" and "Antony and Cleopatra".
 3. There is in the Bibliothèque Nationale a cartoon, "La perruque de Racine", which depicts the Romantics, under the banner of Shakespeare, in the act of setting fire to Racine's wig. Under the banner of the three unities the Classicists are attempting to put out the fire.

how Racine composed tragedies which were then, and always have been, and probably always will be opposed to the English conception of tragedy and to the English temperament. As recently as 1938 the "Times Literary Supplement" was able to comment with justification:

"There are, no doubt, genuine English 'fans' of Racine, though surely not many. But with all the good will in the world and complete faith in the standards of French classicism, the rest of us sigh heavily over the resounding syllables of Andromaque and Bérénice, and prefer to think of Antony and Cleopatra".

It is unfortunate that "Bérénice" and "Antony and Cleopatra" (1) should have been quoted in the above article as being indicative of the respective taste of France and of England in matters of tragic drama. They are indeed characteristic inasmuch as no play could more closely follow the unities than "Bérénice" or be more at variance with them than "Antony and Cleopatra". Yet, in the French play, Titus, having to choose between Bérénice and an Empire, chooses the Empire, which is traditionally "English". In the English play, Antony, faced with a similar choice, opts for Cleopatra, which is rather in harmony with French tradition. Because of

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1. These two plays are contrasted by Mr. Lytton Strachey: "Landmarks in French Literature". 1912. p. 95f. The author uses the word "concentration" to sum up the technique of "Bérénice" in particular and French drama in general. The equivalent epitome of English drama, says Mr. Strachey, is "comprehension".

the choice which each makes, "Antony and Cleopatra" is now as acceptable to the French (1), despite its lack of plot and disregard of the unities, as it is to us, and in this one respect at least even more to their liking than "Bérénice". The English mind rates Antony, in the words of Mr. Somerset Maugham: "a damned fool"(2). The French mind, on the other hand, admires him and would sooner apply to Titus Mr. Maugham's description.

In both life and tragic drama, England follows the definition of a tragedy given by an anonymous English scientist of the nineteenth century (3):

"a theory killed by a fact".

That is to say that Lear's "theory" that he could divest himself of his power and still retain his old position in family and in state, was "killed" by the harsh fact that he had two daughters who said they loved him, but did not, and one who did but would not say so. In Racine's tragedy, the reverse is almost true: the "fact" of Phèdre's love for Hippolyte is "killed" by the "theory"

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1. In the written version, at least. The Stratford stage production of the play in Paris during January 1954 was a failure. See also note 1, p.103.
2. "The Summing Up". 1938. pp.142 -143.
3. Quoted by Professor D.W. Brogan. "The English People". 1943. p.222.

of predeterminism and of capitulation to the Fates.

That indicates a radical and persistent difference in the attitude of each nation to the eternal conflict between passion and conscience, or love and duty. Boileau, whose "L'Art Poétique" (Chant III) is the theory of what Racine's tragedy is, and, by extension, what Shakespeare's is not, thought that love should be counterbalanced by remorse and should appear as a weakness, not as a virtue (1).

The idea of treating love as a disease was the originality of Racine, and it persists in French literature through Stendhal and Proust to Mauriac, Gide and the present day. It gave rise to the great feminine roles of Racine's tragedies: Phèdre, Andromaque, Hermione, as opposed to the masculine Lear, Othello, Hamlet and Macbeth (2).

Nor is the "weakness" (3) of Racinian love a superficial one. If Phèdre had appeared to the French audience merely as a woman who had to decide of her own free-will between right and wrong, the play in which she appears would not have won the reputation it has constantly enjoyed. Phèdre is beset by the Gods, by the Fates, by the

1. Chant III. lines 101-102.

2..To complete the antithesis Molière's great comic roles are masculine, Shakespeare's (apart from Falstaff) feminine. See context of note 1, p.248.

3. A deliberate weakness of character, not of construction.

Devil, and it is in the very hopelessness of this Jansenism, this unavailing struggle against predeterminism, that French interest lies.

Moreover, this struggle is the crux of the play; it is the play. If we were to take away those references to "fatal", "charme" and "malgré moi" the play would cease to exist. Now nothing could be further from the truth in Shakespeare's four principal tragedies, where there is no all-consuming passion. "Othello" comes nearest to analysing this passion, but the struggle in Othello's mind is not as profound as that in Phèdre's. The success or failure of the English play depends rather on the credibility of the wickedness of Iago than on any conflict between what Othello does of his own free-will and what he is compelled by some outside force to do.

In "Macbeth" and in "Hamlet" the love-interest is relatively unimportant, and in "King Lear" more of a virtue than a weakness, at least as far as Edmund is concerned. Shakespeare nowhere suggests in the character of Edmund that there is anything other than self-propulsion in his affairs with Regan and Goneril. Even if there were, it would still be no more than subsidiary to the story of what happens to an elderly king who unwisely casts off power before he casts off life.

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When Lear appeals to the Gods(1) it is because they are as old as he is, and even when Gloucester says (2) that the Gods use us as boys use flies, the "sport" is mythological rather than Jansenist. The witches in "Macbeth" are just witches, the ghost in "Hamlet" is just a ghost. No imagination can turn them into bodily incarnations of some "force fatale" which compels Hamlet and Macbeth on to their respective ends.

Shakespeare's heroes bring about their own downfall. They die from repentance rather than despair. On the other hand, Jocaste (3) seems to sum up Racine's women characters:

"Tout ce que je puis faire, hélas! c'est de mourir".

The greatness of Racine lies in the fact that, taking the plays as they stand, one is forced to agree with this lugubrious second-act defeatism. Shakespeare's characters, by contrast, live energetically until they die (4) and when they do die it is not so much a pious duty (except for Othello) as a natural process.

Only on a general basis can

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1. "King Lear". Act II.sc.iv.line 274.
2. "King Lear". Act IV.sc.i. line 36.
3. "La Thébaïde". Act II.sc.iv.line 15.
4. Hamlet has not been allowed to do this in France.

Shakespeare and Racine be brought together in that respect. Each takes a human being for his plot (1) and each shows how life seems to consist of a losing battle nobly fought. Otherwise the difference between them is enormous. Racine's plays are profound, Shakespeare's all-embracing and nearly as profound. Shakespeare's tragedy is:

"human nature tried in the crucible of affliction",

Racine's consists of human nature:

"exhibited in the vague theorems of speculation" (2).

From this one difference arises another. Though one may obtain varying results from experiments in crucibles, there is only one way of expressing a theorem. Thus, in Shakespeare one is always aware of the personal, spontaneous word or phrase, whereas Racine appears, to the uninitiated English ear, to bring forward the stock phrase. When Lear's reason is tottering (3) he applies his own experience to Poor Tom:

"Nothing could have subdued Nature

To such a lowness, but his unkind daughters". .

That

is a spontaneous outburst which belongs solely to

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1. According to Galsworthy, a human-being is the best of plots.
 2. William Hazlitt. "Sir Walter Scott, Racine and Shakespeare". In: "The Plain Speaker". 1870. p.487.
 3. Act III.sc.iv.

Shakespeare and solely to Act III.sc.iv. of "King Lear".

By contrast, when Phèdre is on the point of dying she utters the cry:

"Le ciel mit dans mon sein une flamme funeste" (1).

This stock-phrase, however pleasing it may be, is no more personal to Phèdre than to Andromaque, or to Racine than to any other dramatist. It is almost a proverbial expression.

Racine and Shakespeare, in idea if not in expression, are both universal in that each demands a personal approach. But each demands it in a different way. Racine's plays are capable of only one interpretation, which is the reason, or one reason, why they are so rarely performed except by French actors.

In an article called "What is the Classical Style?" (2)? Mr.J.E.Barton said:

"Classical writers allow their reader to do his own thinking. They offer bold outlines of thought and character, in orderly form, which each generation can reinterpret through its own psychology".

While that is partly true, it is also true to say that "Phèdre" has one point of interest and one only, that of an

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1. Act V.sc.vii.line 1625.

2. vol.3."Comparative Literature Studies".Cardiff.
1941.

incestuous love, whatever "reinterpretation" may be revealed by a new generation. The world knows this, and "Phèdre" is in that way universal.

On the contrary, we know only too well that "Hamlet" and "King Lear" may contain whatever each individual wants them to contain, so that they also, for the very opposite reason, are universal. Mr. Barton's judgment on Classical writers is, apart from the "orderly form", equally true of Shakespeare. Lear is now an idiotic old man, now a psychological truth, and now a pathetic human-being faced with a tragic universe. It is, perhaps, more true of Shakespeare, because nowhere does he attempt to write "pièces à thèse", which is what Racine's plays are to many English readers.

Possibly the position could be summed up by saying that Racine is universal in the sense that the Morse Code is universal, Shakespeare in the sense that eating is (1). Racine's characters are true of any country at any time, Shakespeare's have an English style as well as being universal. Both, for those exactly opposite reasons, are

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1. This difference is expressed in the "Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise" (p.433) by Professor E. Legouis and Professor L. Cazamian in terms of:
 - (a). Racine and French drama compared to a watch. This may be complicated, but it is understood by the watchmaker;
 - and (b). Shakespeare and English drama compared to a child, who is so complex that "it is a wise father who knows his own child".

difficult or impossible to translate.

A further appraisal of Chant III of Boileau's "L'Art Poétique" gives rise to another difference between the plays of Racine and Shakespeare. Lines 27-28 show Boileau's view that a tragedy should plunge "in medias res". Now it is not merely that Racine's plays do this, passively; they are so designed that they must do so. They have been described as abscesses ready to burst, and the bursting is not delayed. So true is this that the first line of a tragedy of Racine conveys the impression that something, perhaps a whole play as Shakespeare conceived it, must have been omitted.

In "Athalie", for instance, the first word is "Oui", Abner's reply to Joad's unexpressed astonishment. "Andromaque" begins in the same way with a similar "Oui" from Oreste to Pylade. "Phèdre" opens with a definitive "Le dessein en est pris" from Hippolyte to Thérèse, and "Britannicus" with an explosive "Quoi!" from Albine to Agrippine.

In Shakespeare's tragedies, events do not begin so quickly. We have first to see how the "abscesses" form. In "King Lear" there are introductions to be made before the play can begin, in "Hamlet" a guard to be changed. "Macbeth", despite its rapid movement, opens in an atmosphere of opera and pantomime, while "Othello", according to Dr. Samuel Johnson and some French critics, does not really begin

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until the arrival of Othello in Cyprus. A French classical playwright, one imagines, would have begun at that very point, perhaps with the lines which Shakespeare writes in scene iii of Act I:

Senator : "Adieu, brave Moor, use Desdemona well;
 Brabantio: Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
 She has deceived her father, and may thee!"
 Then

a piece of narrative would have served to do what Shakespeare does in his first three scenes, where he:

- (a). Creates the atmosphere of the play.
- (b). Indicates its chief participants.
- (c). Touches briefly on what is to be the centre of dramatic interest.

It is noteworthy in this respect that in the adaptation (1) of "Hamlet" by J-F. Ducis, only two lines have been heard when Claudius (now the "First Prince of the Blood") tells Polonius that he intends to dethrone Hamlet (now "King of Denmark").

Apart from the obvious distortion of Shakespeare's plot(2), this adaptation of "Hamlet" is

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1. French adaptations of Shakespeare nearly always reveal more about the French approach to Shakespeare than do the more faithful translations.
2. In the version of Ducis (1792), Claudius is the father of Ophelia, and, after murdering Hamlet's mother, is in turn killed at the end of the play by Hamlet, who thus loses Ophelia, but announces that he has done his duty.

in itself an indication of two differences between French Classical tragedy and Shakespeare's tragedy.

First, the twenty-two characters in Shakespeare's play are reduced to eight in the version of Ducis, the same number as in "Phèdre" and in "Andromaque" (1).

Secondly, whereas the "Hamlet" of Shakespeare opens with rapid dialogue and is allowed to be one of Shakespeare's best expositions, the "Hamlet" of Ducis has in its first scene a speech of some eighty lines, presumably for the benefit of the actor taking the part of Claudius.

As a result of the long tirades of French Classical tragedy, John Dryden became quite humorous (2) and seemed to foreshadow the "Times Literary Supplement" quoted on page 111 of this chapter, when he wrote (3) of French declamatory art that it was so tiring to the English that:

"instead of persuading us to grieve for their imaginary heroes, we are concerned for our own

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1. See also note 2, p.96.

2. Dryden probably had Corneille in mind when he wrote this, although Racine's "Andromaque" had appeared during the previous year.

3. "Of Dramatick Poesie".1668.pp.40-41. Nevertheless, Professor E.Legouis and Professor L.Cazamian have noted ("A History of English Literature".1930. 1948 edition, p.654) a Racinian influence in Dryden's "Aureng-Zebe" (1675).

trouble, as we are in the tedious visits of bad company, we are in pain till they are gone".

Most Englishmen and few Frenchmen would agree with Dryden's continuation:

" ----- their (French) actors speak by the hour-glass, as our parsons do; nay they account it the grace of their parts: and think themselves disparaged by the poet, if they may not twice or thrice in a play entertain the Audience with a speech of an hundred or two hundred lines".

Thus, while French Classical tragedy plunges directly into the heart of the matter, it is not against the rules to indulge from time to time in a long discourse (1).

Thus, "Andromaque", having begun rapidly with the answer to a pre-curtain question, pauses at the fifth speech of the play for Oreste to deliver sixty-seven and a half lines of rhetoric. Shakespeare has been reproached by French critics for much shorter pieces of "padding" than that, which seems to indicate once again that form and content are the points at issue, not the inclusion of rhetoric as

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1. F.Brunetière was one of the very few French critics to condemn this quasi-operatic tendency. Indeed, he thought that "Phèdre" was so near to opera that it marked the decline of French tragedy. See: A.A.Tilley. "Three French Dramatists" (Racine, Marivaux, Musset). Cambridge. 1933. p.71.

such. The French will support Oreste's oration on the grounds that it sets the plot in motion by narrating what has gone before, whereas, they will say, Macbeth's cry that his:

"bloody hands will the multitudinous seas incarnadine" (1)

is an exaggerated image which has an intrinsic interest, but which adds nothing to the play.

The difference seems to be this: French drama tends to consist more of conversation than of activity (2), while in England energy is preferred to garrulity. If Shakespeare had found a place for Lear's wife in his tragedy (3), she would probably have used more than the mother's tears of Andromaque for Astyanax to save Cordelia.

In other terms, the French demand that a play shall teach them more about themselves, we English that it shall make life richer. Each of these traits is reflected to the utmost in Racine and Shakespeare respectively. Racine develops a situation on given data without resorting to action, almost as

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1. Act II.sc.ii.

2. The actor Monsieur Jean-Louis Barrault calls French spiritual life: "une conversation passionnée". ("A propos de Shakespeare et du théâtre". La Parade. 1949. p.13.

3. As Mr.Gordon Bottomley did in "King Lear's Wife". (1920).

an algebraic equation is solved (which Alfred de Vigny, as might be expected, condemned, but at the same time respected as a great feat (1)). In direct contrast, Shakespeare's tragedy is full of action, as we have already seen (2).

As a result, Racine's characters assume the remoteness of mathematical formulae, what Monsieur François Mauriac calls in his "Journal" (3) the no-man's land between the ~~head~~ and the heart where no one can penetrate who is not French.

Furthermore, the French audience, used to Thésée's:

"Faut-il que sur le front d'un profane adultère
Brille de la vertu le sacré caractère?
Et ne devrait-on pas à des signes certains
Reconnaître le coeur des perfides humains?" (4),

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well-formed, nicely balanced quatrain, is somewhat startled when "Macbeth" shows Duncan coming straight to the point with:

"There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face" (5).

This

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1. "Lettre à Lord XXX sur la soirée du 24 octobre 1829 et sur un système dramatique". See note 1, p.4.
 2. pp.86-87.
 3. III.1940.p.203.
 4. "Phèdre". Act IV.sc.ii.lines 3-6.
 5. Act I.sc.iv.line 16.

version is much more natural than that of Racine. It might conceivably have been spoken by an Elizabethan gentleman, whereas no French or any other man, except an actor in a play, ever spoke as Thésée does. Yet French critics as a whole still prefer rhyming couplets to Shakespeare's blank verse (1).

However, French dramatic poetry has to arouse both emotion and admiration, and what Racine loses in passion he gains in perfection. In connection with this, one of Dryden's interlocutors affirmed (2) that the pursuing of one theme gave the author more liberty to dwell on the verse representation of passion.

Nevertheless, Stendhal showed that it was because of the difference in form that Shakespeare more often created a sense of illusion than did Racine. In other words, too much attention to the alexandrine and its effect on the ear prevented the creation of illusion. However, though the form which Racine adopted is poor in the hands of his imitators, it flourished in his own: one cannot improve a single alexandrine of Racine's. Paul Valéry is reported to have tried, and to have given up in despair after three

1. Approximately two-thirds of Shakespeare's work is written in blank-verse.

2. "Of Dramatick Poesie". 1668. p.30.

days. This technical perfection in verse is such that the majority of French people go to listen to the plays of Racine rather than to see them acted. They go to hear declaimed the "justes pensées" and the "paroles limpides" which Anatole France ascribed to his divine Racine. Their attitude caused Matthew Arnold to say (1) that the actors who play Corneille and Racine are better than the plays they act in.

Perhaps that is one reason, if a minor one, why French Classical tragedy fell away on the death of Talma in 1826, and why Kemble, more French than English in his declamation, proved such a success in the English company which visited Paris in 1827-1828. But whereas a French audience will listen enraptured to a Mounet-Sully:

"prolongeant avec des sonorités d'oiseau de nuit les finales de tous les vers pour leur donner un cachet de désespoir mélancolique" (3),

undue emphasis on the rhyming syllables tends to ruin any feeling which an English audience might derive from Racine's lines.

Racine loses nothing in that way,

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1. "The Nineteenth Century". August 1879: "The French Play in London". p.236.

2. Although Talma was criticized on occasion for "speaking" his lines.

3. F.Sarcey. "Quarante ans de théâtre". vol.3.1900. p.11.

except perhaps the chance of a wider reputation outside France, but it does mean that the blank verse (which Aristotle thought best for tragedy) and the varying rhythms of Shakespeare's tragedies sound as strange to the French ear, even now, as the ponderous, incessant alexandrine does to ours, particularly if it happens to be in an attempted translation of Shakespeare (1).

Nor will the French be convinced that it is unnatural to sorrow in rhyming couplets or to be angry at great length, any more than we will allow ourselves to follow Boileau in proclaiming that great art can and should exist outside of life itself. We have yet to show the French critics that it is the short thunder-shower which overtops the banks, not the long, steady downpour. They have yet to accept that Shakespeare's characters, as we do in life, speak differently one from the other, differently enough for Rowe, Pope and Addison to assert that we could assign many of Shakespeare's speeches to the appropriate character even if Shakespeare had omitted his or her name.

In Racine's plays, on the other hand:

"rois, héros poudrés et valets n'ont qu'un seul et même diapazon" (2).

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1. Those of Ducis, for example.
2. Le Chevalier de Chatelain. Introduction to his adaptation of "Macbeth". 1862. p.ix. In modern French, the "z" of "diapazon" becomes an "s".

The trained French ear denies that this is so, and that it is in fact possible to detect different levels of speech in Racine's plays. Yet the same ear detects rather than accepts. It detects, and defends Racine when called upon to do so, but settles down not to accept Shakespeare who is equally skilled at the art. One returns to this constantly: it is impossible radically to alter national taste.

The plays of Racine and Shakespeare are similar in that each of them gave to his respective age exactly what each age wanted. Racine, Shakespeare and Molière would all have agreed that:

"Le secret est d'abord de plaire et de toucher" (1),

but Shakespeare would have found himself at variance with the other two when it came to discussing the technique thereof.

Not only do the characters of Racine and Shakespeare speak differently as such, but they also direct their speeches differently. Monsieur Albert Thibaudet says (2) that Shakespeare's characters speak for the public's benefit, whereas French dramatists make their characters speak for each

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1. Boileau. "L'Art Poétique". Chant III. line 25.

2. "Réflexions sur la littérature". 1938. p.89.

other. Apart from the "asides" of Shakespeare's plays, which are obviously for the public's benefit, the reverse appears to be nearer the truth.

Quite apart from the fact mentioned on page 126, namely that a French audience listens to Racine's work in a way that an English audience does not listen to Shakespeare's, the almost total absence of rapid dialogue in Racine's work seems to make this clear. The French of 1820-1830, with Shakespeare as their idol, criticized severely this lack of dialogue. Stendhal thought that Racine's plays were sublime as epic poetry, but not as drama (1), while Alfred de Vigny thought (2) that drama consisted of various people gathered together to talk of their experiences, and so they ought to speak, to speak in the way that Molière's characters speak.

If Phèdre had been speaking solely for Oenone's benefit at the point where Phèdre's incestuous love for Hippolyte is revealed, she would not have needed or been capable of forty-eight alexandrines (3). On the other hand, if Shakespeare had wished Cordelia to address the farewell to her sisters (4) to the audience also, he would have given her more than eight lines. Furthermore, we may compare the message which Thérémène brings to Thésée (5), one of

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1. "Racine et Shakespeare". 1822.p.112.

2. Introduction to his translation of "Othello".1829.

3. "Phèdre".Act I.sc.iv.lines 269-316.

4. "King Lear". Act I.sc.i.

5. "Phèdre".Act V.sc.vi.lines 1498-1570.

seventy-three lines, with that which a messenger brings to Albany (1):

Albany: "Who dead? Speak man.

Gentleman: Your lady, sir, your lady; and her sister
By her is poison'd: she confesses it".

Before discussing the different ways in which the characters of Shakespeare and Racine speak, we mentioned how far apart the two authors are in their respective methods of beginning a play. The same may be said of their endings.

A striking difference here between Shakespeare and Racine is that Shakespeare's endings seem much more artificially contrived than do Racine's. He seems anxious to rid himself of as many characters as possible (2), and so Act V of "Hamlet" or "King Lear" becomes a procession of corpses.

In Racine, the characters who die do so because they must. They die a reported death, moreover, reported with measure and good taste:

"Bajazet est sans vie.L'ignorez-vous?"(3).

That is

as Horace (4) and Boileau (5) ordained:

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1. "King Lear". Act V.sc.iii.

2. Probably as a result of having had to clear his stage without the aid of a curtain.

3. "Bajazet". Act V.sc.xi.line 20.

4. "Ars Poetica". line 180.

5. "L'Art Poétique". Chant III.lines 53-54.

"Mais il est des objets que l'art judicieux,
Doit offrir à l'oreille et reculer des yeux".

Shakespeare's audiences were inclined to think differently, and Shakespeare gave them what succeeding generations of French critics have been unable to accept. Nor have they been able to accept certain "invraisemblances" in Shakespeare:

"Jamais au spectateur n'offrez rien d'incroyable:
Le vrai peut quelquefois n'être pas vraisemblable".

(1). Now

the French have said of Shakespeare's postulates that perhaps they could happen in real life, but they are not realistic. Thus, if Cordelia had humoured her father there would have been no "King Lear". We might reply, however, that if Panope had checked his facts before announcing the "death" of Thésée, there would have been no "Phèdre". It is difficult to see how the one is any more realistic than the other. Every play begins with a postulate or hypothesis: that is the essence of drama.

To return to the endings of the plays we find that Racine might very well take up one of Shakespeare's tragedies at the point where Shakespeare is about to make his protagonist die. Lear would be made to review the follies of his earlier life, Macbeth would meditate on the worthlessness of

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1. Boileau. "L'Art Poétique". Chant III. lines 47-48.

what he had achieved, Othello would remain to expiate in mental torment the result of his credulity, and Hamlet would live to see what a train of horror the ghost of his father had set in motion. When action ceases, Shakespeare ceases, whereas Racine is about, as we saw on page 119, to lance his "abscess".

Further analysis of French adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedies shows one difference at least between the adaptors' conception of a denouement and Shakespeare's. The majority of French adaptations of "King Lear", for instance, have ended with Lear's:

"Look there, look there".(He dies). (1).

It

has been customary, also, for French adaptations of "Hamlet" to end at:

"The rest is silence".

There is no classical precedent for this measure. Racine has ten lines after the death of Phèdre; Shakespeare has only eighteen after the death of Lear. Racine supplements this figure with five whole scenes after the death of Britannicus, which he explains thus (2):

"Pour moi, j'ai toujours compris que la

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1. This, for instance, is the point at which the curtain fell in the 1904 version of Pierre Loti and Emile Vedel.
2. Preface to the first edition of "Britannicus".

tragédie étant l'imitation d'une action complète, où plusieurs personnes concourent, cette action n'est point finie que l'on ne sache en quelle situation elle laisse ces mêmes personnes: c'est ainsi que Sophocle en use presque partout".

Thus when French translators omit the ends of Shakespeare's tragedies on the grounds of "classicism", denying us the sight of Macduff crowned or of the arrival of Fortinbras, they are going further than their masters intended. The aim of classicism, one of general unity, has become obscured by the means of arrival.

"Unity" or "unities", that is the question:

"Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un seul fait accompli
Tienne jusqu'à la fin le théâtre rempli" (1).

Racine's version of that, contained again in the preface to the first edition of "Britannicus", was:

"Une action simple, chargée de peu de matière, telle que doit être une action qui se passe en un jour, et qui s'avancant par degrés vers sa fin n'est soutenue que par les intérêts, les sentiments et les passions des personnages".

It would be difficult to compose a definition more completely opposed to Shakespeare's

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1. Boileau. "L'Art Poétique". Chant III. lines 45-46.

conception of tragedy, and not every French critic has admired the rigidity of the formula thus expressed. Stendhal, for instance, would have agreed that Racine had composed "classical" plays which the Ancient Greeks would not have recognized.

Shakespeare has what Stendhal valued most: a unity of interest, a unity which might best be described by Mr.Curdle's definition in Charles Dickens' "Nicholas Nickleby":

"a completeness, ----- a kind of universal dovetailedness with regard to place and time ----- a sort of a general oneness, if I may be allowed to use so strong an expression".

Despite all his sub-plots, his patchings and fashionings, Shakespeare shows us a number of characters gradually moving towards a particular end. This is the essential unity, a "general oneness", an organic unity rather than a literary one.

Francisque Sarcey (1) refused to allow Racine the title of dramatic author because he had not the natural instinct to rival Shakespeare in his sense of unity. While few Frenchmen would agree(2)

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1. "Quarante ans de théâtre". vol.3. 1900. p.125.

2. Although Victor Hugo and his contemporaries would have accepted this.

with this minority verdict, it is not without foundation. The unity of action in "Andromaque" may lie in the story of Hermione or in that of Andromaque herself. Shakespeare would almost certainly have made everything in that play, however loosely composed, relative to either one or the other. There are no challengers to Lear, to Hamlet, to Macbeth or to Othello for the title of protagonist, in the way that Hermione is a challenge to Andromaque.

It was this unified force in Shakespeare's four principal tragedies which led Lessing, as Coleridge pointed out, to prove to the Germans that Shakespeare was incomparably more coincident with the principles of Aristotle than were Corneille and Racine, notwithstanding the boasted regularity of the latter. French critics, even now, would not readily agree to that, but it is a justifiable point of view.

Certainly it suggests that Classicism in seventeenth-century France was more of an intellectual effort than a historical development or a neo-Hellenic revival. No reference to Aeschylus and Seneca will alter this fact. Boileau's "L'Art Poétique" was a seventeenth-century "a priori" definition of drama, but the writing of the world's

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first play had made such a task impossible.

Horace, in his "Ars Poetica", was more justified in his attempt because Greek literature and life were developing in step with each other. We recall how Guizot, translator and critic of Shakespeare, thought that in this idea of hand-in-hand development, this "fitness" we might say, the Elizabethan era in England was more akin to the theatre of Ancient Greece than was French Classical drama (1).

In putting forward this unusual point of view we do not suggest that Shakespeare was aware of any of the rules which Racine turned to good effect. There has been some unfortunate criticism from France on the subject of Shakespeare and the rules. Thus, George Sand, in the Introduction to her adaptation of "As You Like It" (2), typifies this particular brand of criticism by saying that Shakespeare being Shakespeare it was quite in order for him openly to flout not only the rules of composition, but also certain "necessary" spiritual needs: order, sobriety, harmony and logic. The author did not indicate whose spiritual needs these were; obviously they are French, not English, not Shakespeare's. Criticism such as this is bad, because

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1. F. Guizot. "De Shakespeare et de la poésie dramatique". 1822. p.10.

2. 1856. See pp.343-346.

if it is suggested that Shakespeare ignored rules, not every Frenchman will agree with the qualifying remark that all was possible and permissible to Shakespeare just because he was Shakespeare. On the contrary, we are certain that Shakespeare was not aware of any rules.

While this one assertion does not break down the barriers between England and France, it does make Shakespeare more comprehensible in that country. Shakespeare was not a rebel, any more than Seneca and Racine were. He has survived as they have survived: because they were of the "fittest", Seneca because he could not help so being, Racine (1) because he had the genius to develop the lead Corneille had given him, and Shakespeare because he had the genius to continue where Marlowe's "Tamburlaine" left off, without at the same time sacrificing his native English tradition to some newly unearthed system.

Those are the reasons why Seneca, Shakespeare and Racine stand at the top of three of the four literary peaks mentioned above. Of the valleys between them, that between Racine and Shakespeare is the most difficult to cross.

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1. In the words of Monsieur Eugène Vinaver (Avant-propos: "Racine et la poésie tragique". 1951) Racine survives because he: "maintient la conception essentiellement classique de l'art, qui veut que le drame soit un jeu de sentiments ayant une portée universelle".
 2. p.98.

Chapter 7

Shakespeare, Racine and Poetry (1)

It is now time to develop a point made earlier (2) in order to see what it is in Shakespeare's poetry which makes difficult or impossible not translation of words this time, but translation of feelings. When every French intellectual can accept:

"like to a silver bow New bent in heaven"(3)

as

poetry, it will no longer be necessary to distinguish between English poetry on the one hand and French poetry on the other.

Meanwhile, the distinction must be drawn, as it has been since the eighteenth century. Even then it was realized that since Chaucer and Villon it was becoming increasingly difficult for a poet in one country to be regarded as a poet in the other. Later English comments generally indicated in fact that poetry was non-existent in France.

Voltaire, as might be expected, was

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1. See particularly the work quoted on the previous page: E. Vinaver. "Racine et la poésie tragique". 1951. Monsieur Vinaver studies Racine's poetry under seven headings: (a). Le pathétique retrouvé; (b). Dissonances et résolutions; (c). L'Intérieur vivant; (d). Ressources et procédés; (e). La poésie du sacrifice; (f). L'Egarement; (g). La Reconnaissance.
 2. p.13: simple metaphor as opposed to poetic imagery.
 3. "A Midsummer Night's Dream". Act I.sc.i.lines 9-10.

quick to seize on the basic difference which gave England pride of place in matters of dramatic poetry (1). After spending two years in this country he wrote to Lord Bolingbroke in 1730:

"Ce qui m'effraya le plus, en rentrant dans cette carrière, ce fut la sévérité de notre poésie et l'esclavage de la rime. Je regrettais cette heureuse liberté que vous avez d'écrire vos tragédies en vers non rimés; de faire enjamber les vers les uns sur les autres; et de créer dans le besoin des termes nouveaux qui sont toujours adoptés chez vous, lorsqu'ils sont sonores, intelligibles et nécessaires. Un poète anglais, disais-je, est un homme libre qui asservit sa langue à son génie; le Français est un esclave de la rime, obligé de faire quelquefois quatre vers pour exprimer une pensée qu'un Anglais peut rendre en une seule ligne. L'Anglais dit tout ce qu'il veut, le Français tout ce qu'il peut; l'un court dans une carrière vaste, et l'autre marche avec des entraves dans un chemin glissant et étroit".

In matters of form, the English poet had then, as he has now, a complete freedom of language and of construction which was denied to the French. But the difference does not end there. In the preface to his translation of Shakespeare (2), Pierre

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1. Although he recanted later in life, when Shakespeare seemed to him to be gaining too quickly in popularity in French literary salons.

2. vol.1.1776.

Letourneur said that Shakespeare's poetry was composed by inspiration rather than by art, and, as is often evident, Letourneur was more correct than is sometimes thought to be the case by modern critics.

We of this age have seen how true his remark was, allowing for the fact that its author expressed it as something of an apology. England has no equivalent of the Parnassian and Symbolist groups of poets, where form and message are the essentials and other considerations irrelevant, and where many of our current notions of poetry are challenged by the nature of the statue-like verse or by its abstract quality.

Few unenlightened English students can read Théodore de Banville or Rimbaud and grant them the title of poets (1). They merely seem to bear out something that had been noticed in England as early as 1785 (2):

"We are rich, too, in the language of poetry. Our poetical style differs widely from prose, not in point of numbers only, but in the very words themselves -----herein we are infinitely superior to the French, whose poetical language, if it were not distinguished by rhyme, would not be known to differ from their ordinary prose -----".

We

are quite prepared to accept French writers as supreme

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1. That is, poets free from questioning inverted commas.

2. Blair's Lectures. vol.1.1785.p.218.

craftsmen in prose, even in poetic prose, but we refuse to accept French poets as such because they appear first and foremost as prosaic verse-writers(1).

What Monsieur Albert Camus called the "monotonie passionnée" of classical verse is to the English reader monotony without any semblance of feeling. When Osmin calmly reiterates (2):

"Bajazet est sans vie. L'ignoriez-vous?"

there is at once the shock and control which the French demand of their classical poetry, and a capable French actor will manage to convey both. The English actor, on the other hand, would say this line in the matter-of-fact tone of comedy:

"And is old Double dead?" (3).

In his best poetry he does not expect to find someone saying:

"Bajazet's dead, then. Didn't you know?".

This might suffice for an Edmund:

"Edmund is dead, my Lord" (4),

but not for a

Cordelia (4):

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1. Guy de Pourtalès. "De Hamlet à Swann".1924.p.30.

2. "Bajazet". Act V.sc.xi.line 20.

3. "2Henry IV".Act III.sc.ii.

4. "King Lear".Act V.sc.iii.

"And my poor fool is hang'd: no, no, no life?
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
 And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
 Never, never, never, never, never.
 Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir.
 Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips,
 Look there, look there".

Amédée Pichot, whose reserve at a period of intense anglomania makes his remarks worth noting, would have welcomed such an outburst as a relief from the artificial rhetoric of French Classical tragedy. In a letter to Duviquet, dramatic critic of the "Journal des Débats" (1), Pichot puts his finger on something which marks the beginning of the decline of French poetry which was evident at that time. Pichot wrote thus:

"Le choix de sujets français eût influé sur le style de la scène; Racine aurait forcé notre poésie de nommer un peu plus souvent les choses par leurs noms; nous aurions un peu moins de périphrases sonores ou fleuries, et un peu plus de vérité dans le langage et les mœurs ----- en débutant par des pièces nationales, Racine eût fait moins de concessions à ces mœurs et à ce style d'étiquette, si beau quand sa muse l'emploie, si monotone chez ses successeurs. Un style plus vrai, plus français, eût facilité une plus

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1. Quoted by Professor L. Bisson in his biography of Pichot. p.243.

grande variété de sujets. Ceux qui connaissent la versification anglaise me comprendront quand je dirai combien le vers blanc se prête facilement à tous les tons; notre alexandrin est trop épique".

Yet our remarks so far, pointing out as they do differences in language and form, make no direct reference to those elements which we in England think of as a "sine qua non" of great poetry: a wealth of metaphor, of fancy and of imagination.

It is only rarely that Racine presents us with an image such as:

"Mais tout dort, et l'armée, et les vents et Neptune",

but even there form is paramount and the image cannot be developed as it is in "Henry V" (1). However, we ought to accept the line, and to ignore its compact beauty would be foolish.

Mr. Lytton Strachey thought (2) that the above line had equally as much significance as (some will say more than) the:

"Not a mouse stirring"

in "Hamlet", which we readily accept. He developed his theme by showing how, when most moved, Racine's characters speak with masterly succinctness:

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1. Act IV.sc.i., the scene where the disguised King Henry walks through his sleeping camp.
2. "Literary Essays".1948.pp.68-69, and p.75.

- (a). Hermione : "Qui te l'a dit?".
- (b). Roxane : "Sortez".
- (c). Mithridate: "Je vais à Rome".
- (d). Athalie : "Dieu des Juifs, tu l'emportes!"

Shakespeare's method is different,
adds Strachey:

"There, as passion rises, expression becomes more and more poetical and vague. Image flows into image, thought into thought, until at last the state of mind is revealed, inform and molten, driving darkly through a vast storm of words".

Shakespeare is probably
more real than Racine:

"but Racine's aim was less to reflect the actual current of the human spirit than to seize upon its inmost being and to give expression to that".

As a result, Racine is able to
mould lines such as these spoken by Andromaque (1):

"Et je puis voir répandre un sang si précieux?
Et je laisse avec lui périr tous ses aïeux?
Roi barbare, faut-il que mon crime l'entraîne?
Si je te hais, est-il coupable de ma haine?
T'a-t-il de tous les siens reproché le trépas?
S'est-il plaint à tes yeux des maux qu'il ne sent pas?".

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1. "Andromaque". Act III.sc.viii.lines 51-56.

Quoting these lines in his book "Racine et la poésie tragique" (1), Monsieur Eugène Vinaver adds the comment of La Harpe:

"On n'avait pas vu avant Racine cette savante harmonie de la phrase poétique".

One who would have disagreed with the high honour thus accorded to Racine by La Harpe was Matthew Arnold. When Victor Hugo had said earlier that there was no prose in England, it was intended as a compliment to us as poets. But when Arnold accused(2) the French of lacking the distinctive spirit of high poetry, it was a straightforward condemnation. The defect in French literature and literary criticism was to Arnold:

"the inadequacy of their genius in the higher regions of poetry".

To support this view, Arnold quotes two nocturnal descriptions, the first from Victor Hugo's "Hernani":

"----- Sur nous, tout en dormant,
La Nature à demi veille amoureusement ---;
the

second from Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice":

"Sit Jessica; look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold"

The difference is at once apparent.

Not only is the French an abstraction and the English

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1. 1951. pp.146-147.

2. "The French Play in London". In:"The Nineteenth Century". August 1879.

a concrete image, but the effect of each on the reader is different, also. The extract from Hugo is a thought put down on paper. It is complete in itself, a prosaic expression rather than a poetical suggestion. The reader is not made to imagine one particular starry, moonlit evening, but is presented with an abstract thought about such evenings in general. There is none of that sweetness and beauty of description of which Portia's observation is compact.

Nor does Arnold allow Hugo's use of the alexandrine to be superior to Shakespeare's use of the iambic. By the side of Shakespeare's:

"This precious stone set in the silver sea"
he

quotes:

"----- Quant à lutter ensemble
Sur le terrain d'amour, beau champ qui
toujours tremble
De fadaïses, mon cher, je sais mal faire
assaut",

with its artificial "beau champ qui
toujours tremble".

Similarly, in the present century, Mr. John Palmer has pointed out (1) the great weakness of the restriction of the alexandrine as opposed to blank-verse:

"His (the French poet's) alexandrine is an
excellent device for the conveying of good sense,

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1. "Comedy". 1914. p.60.

diaphanous and transcendental",

but neither it nor
the French language as a whole can:

"catch at the infinite in harmonies and
rhythms of speech, in words that are steeped in
centuries of vague emotion, in lines that beat with
a rhythm of the feet of expired generations".

Still more recently, "surrealistic
incantations" was how the "Times Literary Supplement"(1)
described modern French poetry. The same article in
which those two words appear continued:

"For the moment, in France, there is more
poetry in films, cartoons, music-halls and circuses
than in the published works officially catalogued as
poetry".

The accent on form rather than on feeling
which has been powerful for over three centuries in
French poetry may be held responsible for that.

Why should the "higher regions of
poetry" be thought of thus as an English prerogative?
It is Hippolyte Taine who gives us the probable answer
(2). His famous picture of an Anglo-Saxon sitting alone

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1. 27th.May 1955.

2. See:Professor F.C.Roe. "A note on Taine's conception
of the English mind". In:"Studies in French Language,
Literature and History". 1949.

in his hut listening to the sound of rain dripping through the oak-leaves aptly evokes the poetic feeling. It is strange, once again, how the French so easily formulate the theory of a mental process without being able for a moment to put the theory into practice (1). Taine, as Professor Roe points out (2), by means of the very intuition which he thinks un-French, had said after listening to German music:

"I'animal, là-bas, rêve et sent et pénètre les ensembles, au lieu de causer, préciser, juger, découper comme ici" (3).

Although that was said of German music, it might apply equally well to English poetry, for Taine thought that the English and the German temperaments were very similar, the former being distinguishable only by its more positive and practical viewpoint. Otherwise both were:

"intuitive, confused by emotion or sentiment, but penetrating to the heart of things"(4),
 whereas the
 French mind tended to be:

"logical, precise, but incomplete or superficial" (4).

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1. Boileau, for example, who knew what poetry was, but who was not a poet.
2. p.192.
3. When Taine made this remark, he had not been outside his own country.
4. Professor Roe. op.cit. p.190.

Now few would dare to suggest that poetry is superficial, for it penetrates to the heart of things. Climate and Taine's theory of "milieu" have much to do with this ability to penetrate. Taine thought that on the one hand:

"les brouillards et les frimas semblent l'élément naturel des hommes d'une imagination forte et profonde",

while on the other hand:

"il faut en convenir, les climats tempérés sont plus propres à la société qu'à la poésie".

In similar mood, Paul Stapfer wrote in his "Molière et Shakespeare" (1) that the French who "understand the sun" are incapable of "understanding the moon".

Apart from the differences between English poetry and French poetry, and the differences of temperament which give rise to them, what is this inner poetical feeling which enables a person to "understand the moon"? A dictionary of quotations will furnish numerous definitions. Voltaire's is worthy of note (2), namely that poetry says more and in fewer words than prose. To know, however, that poetry is the reflection of the soul or that it is

1. 1887.p.21.Victor Hugo is one exception to Stapfer's remark.

2. In the section on "Poets" in his "Dictionnaire Philosophique".

based on the cumulative effect of past experience, is not to know all. Nor is poetry merely the antithesis of prose.

Generally we may say that while French poetry tends to be an inner thought or feeling committed to paper, English poetry is an outward description provoking inner feelings. Racine's poetry was dedicated to, and thus took second place to the faithful portrayal of passion and particularly of frustrated love.

But such is the subjugation of Racine's poetry that Shakespeare's insistence on poetry has merited reproach from certain French critics. They would agree with their colleague Monsieur René Huchon:

"On peut pécher par excès d'opulence, et on a parfois l'impression que Shakespeare, poète autant que dramaturge, prodigue son superflu. Il s'embarrasse alors de ses propres images, et déconcerte son lecteur"(1).

In fact, Shakespeare is often a poet first and a dramatist second. We would rather try to "prove" that he was a great poet than try to "prove" that he was not a second-rate melodramatist.

1. "Le style de Shakespeare". In: "Les Langues Modernes". 41e.année. no.3. London. 1947.

That is important for this present work, because Faguet said, and some of his compatriots have implied, that anyone could have written "King Lear" (1). It is, they say, a sordid tale of folly and violence, a melodrama copied from an ancient chronicle. But even though this may have been sufficient to attract Elizabethan audiences to the "Globe", it is by no means sufficient to maintain the play as one of the world's greatest tragedies. It is poetry which is responsible for that, poetry which relieves the grim picture of death and suffering.

In connection with this, William Hazlitt said:

"Serious and impassioned poetry appeals to our strength, our magnanimity, our virtue and humanity" (2).

When those qualities are appealed to, we immediately feel, even though we cannot explain the feeling, that there are depths yet to be explored. This is apparent in "King Lear" in the imprecation of Lear as he stands exposed to the storm. It is supremely evident in Lear's speech beginning:

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1. Mr. George Gordon ("Shakespearean Comedy and other studies".1944.p.117)soothes our national pride by his bold assertion that "No Frenchman could have written 'King Lear'".
2. "Lectures on the English Comic Writers".1819.p.39.
3. See:Mr.F.E.Halliday's "The Poetry of Shakespeare's Plays"(1954.p.156)for an analysis of this passage as great poetry.

"and my poor fool is hanged" (1).

As

Mr. Halliday remarks (2):

"What other writer could make great tragic poetry out of monosyllables, dogs and rats and buttons and a fivefold 'never'?".

Shakespeare does, and moves our deepest feelings, the feelings which are similarly stirred by music.

It is Sainte-Beuve who explains this discrepancy:

"En France, où les grandes conceptions poétiques fatiguent aisément, et où elles dépassent la mesure de notre attention, si vite déjouée ou moqueuse, on demande surtout aux poètes ce genre d'imagination et de fertilité qui n'occupe que peu d'instants" (3).

Thus the poetry of "King Lear" is too vast for the French to endure. To write a successful French poem, one need only write:

"J'ai dit ce que je sais et ce que j'ai souffert"

in

several different ways. The French will take this theme and will enhance what is already there, but that does not create beauty so much as interpret it.

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1. Act V.sc.iii. See p.142.

2. p.157.

3. In the Introduction to an edition of La Fontaine's Fables. 1855.

Moreover, beauty in a French poem tends to have a subsequent "utility" (1), usually the utility of form. It may be thought that according to Monsieur E.de Sélincourt's definition of poetry as:

"the expression of a divine discontent"(2),

Baudelaire

might be linked, let us say, with Shelley. But Baudelaire's discontent is with himself; Shelley seethes at the injustice of the world around him.

Mr.T.S.Eliot, in his "Essay on the poetry of W.B.Yeats" (3), noted a further utility of French verse:

"The kind of poetry that I needed to teach me the use of my own voice did not exist in English at all; it was only to be found in French".

That is true,

just as the converse is true: that the kind of poetry one can read without a voice is only to be found in English. It needs two people to read a French poem, the actor and the audience, the speaker and the listener. Racine explains things and one has to listen carefully as his explanations are interpreted. But Shakespeare sings away and it needs only the individual to appreciate him.

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1. Baudelaire, for example.
2. "The Study of Poetry". English Association Pamphlets. no.40. March 1918.
3. 1940.

Shakespeare's tragedies stand or fall by their poetry alone. As soon as one appreciates that, other considerations appear small by comparison. On that assessment, a dry-stone "Shakespearean" wall, rough-edged and filled in with bits and pieces, is as durable and as fine a piece of craftsmanship as a plumb-lined and spirit-levelled brick "Racinian" wall.

Critics have not been reluctant to discuss texts and dates and part-authorship and intention and background history and a host of other subjects. They ought now to concentrate on "Shakespeare's poetry". Pope and Johnson ignored it, Lamb, Hazlitt and Coleridge were intensely aware of it and gave a lead which we ought to follow. With notable exceptions, such as Mr. Granville-Barker, Professor G. Wilson-Knight and particularly Professor Walter Raleigh, we have not done so. It is not encouraging that there should be more entries in a Shakespeare Library catalogue (1) under "Music", "Stratford-upon-Avon" or even "Poems on Shakespeare" than under "Poetry of Shakespeare".

To study Shakespeare's poetry is rewarding in itself. It is, moreover, important to have and to study poetry in these days of doctrinaire tendencies. Poetry balances bigotry, it balances

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1. Shakespeare Memorial Library, Birmingham.

worldliness and prevents larger issues from being obscured by smaller ones. It "seeks for no convertites nor worshippers" (1), but carries on an unselfish criticism of life.

The country which finds itself without great poets is likely to lend weight to Shelley's observation (2) that:

"the cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave".

Coleridge, who saw a greater antithesis between poetry and science than between poetry and prose, would have agreed wholeheartedly. Furthermore, poetry, as Dr. Samuel Johnson pointed out, is the best preserver of language, because people must go to the original to relish it.

While that may irritate translators and make literature national rather than international(3),

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1. Professor Raleigh. "Shakespeare". 1907. p.3.

2. In "Defence of Poetry".

3. Professor Louis Cazamian, delivering the Zaharoff Lecture at Oxford in 1937 ("Retour d'un Anglicisant à la poésie française") pointed out that English literature and French literature would always remain incompatible. Dealing specifically with poetry, he thought that the younger intellectuals in France could find much inspiration in our Romantic poets, but no doubt they would, as he himself had done, return with advancing years to French poetry.

it will ultimately prove advantageous, as Racine and Shakespeare have proved. Poetry is valuable, even, in the field of translation, for while Vigny's version of "Othello" (1) is not perfect, it is nearly so, and it does have the merit of being poetical.

Chapter 8

Comedy in Tragedy: an essay in interpretative criticism

In chapter 2 we wrote (1) of "interpretative criticism". This present chapter will put that theory into practice. The test will be to explain, where an explanation seems desirable, Shakespeare's use of comedy in his four principal tragedies.

The reservation "where an explanation seems desirable" is important. In approaching this question we recall what Mr. Somerset Maugham wrote in his preface to "Altogether" (2):

"No author is perfect. You must accept his defects; they are often the necessary complement to his merits; and this may be said in gratitude to posterity that it is very willing to do this. It takes what is good in a writer and is not troubled by what is bad. It goes so far sometimes, to the confusion of the candid reader, as to claim a profound significance for obvious faults. So you will see the critics (the awe-inspiring voice of posterity) find subtle reasons to explain to his credit something in a play of Shakespeare's that any dramatist could tell them needed

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1. p.34f.

2. 1934.

no other explanation than haste, indifference or wilfulness".

There is much in Shakespeare which can be included in that explanation and which, contrary to that particular part of Mr. Maugham's view, French posterity as a whole has not been willing to accept as a "necessary complement to his merits"(1). Nor has it been of any help that the critics, the Romantic ones especially, have found, or rather invented subtle reasons to explain to his credit Shakespeare's haste, indifference or wilfulness.

Perhaps it was merely in the interests of popular success that Shakespeare included a drinking-song in his "Othello" and a drunken porter (2) in his "Macbeth". Writing on this subject, Professor Walter Raleigh, with his usual clear-sightedness, said (3):

"The question of the mixture of Tragedy and Comedy in the Elizabethan drama is therefore very simple: it was a question not of propriety and classical precedent, but of necessity".

In other words, the Elizabethan audience, quite accustomed to seeing its serious plays "mixed full of pleasant mirth", had certain favourite actors whom it demanded to see as

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1. Punning, obscenity and physical violence, for example.
 2. Possibly this was the only way in which Robert Armin, Shakespeare's chief comic actor, could be introduced.
 3. "Shakespeare". 1907. p.101.

often as possible, irrespective of genre, and it behoved Shakespeare not to disappoint his listeners. They had arrived early in the afternoon, and were in no hurry to be on their way. "Two hours' traffic" must have been the absolute minimum, and an extra song or comic interlude would be much appreciated.

The position of the French critic is this. Shakespeare mixes his genres and writes some of the world's greatest plays. Frenchmen who mix their genres are, to the French, merely second-rate performers, and authors like Hénaut (1685-1770), who inaugurated the historical prose drama with "François II" (a monstrous mixture to the age in which it appeared), and Edmond Rostand (1), have been relegated to the lower ranks. Mixed genres were permissible in medieval times in French literature, but since then French playwrights have been "educated" by Corneille and Racine (2).

Yet Shakespeare is greatest where he mixes comedy with his tragedy. What is it about his handling of a genre midway between pure tragedy and pure comedy which has pleased so many Englishmen from

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1. "Cyrano de Bergerac" (1897); "L'Aiglon" (1900); "Chantecler" (1910).
2. Although Napoleon is reputed to have said that the love-interest in French Classical tragedy was nothing but: "comedy in tragedy".

Dr. Samuel Johnson to Mr.T.S.Eliot?

Let us find an imaginative answer to this question with reference to four problems which trouble French critics. We find one in each of the four tragedies: the role of the Fool in "King Lear", the knocking at the gate in "Macbeth", the grave-diggers in "Hamlet" and the drinking-song in "Othello".

The role of the Fool in "King Lear" is undoubtedly one of the greatest that Shakespeare created. This all-licensed Fool has many sayings which are silly, vulgar, trite or ridiculous. Yet, though we do not see him again after Act III (sc.vi.), somehow he has managed, in staving off Lear's insanity, to touch upon the sublime. He has done that by being an English Fool.

French Fools laugh too easily. Moron, in Molière's "La Princesse d'Elide" laughs in that way, presumably under the influence of the court of Louis XIV. A more famous member of the troupe, the Figaro of Beaumarchais, is equally gay. He may say:

"Je me presse de rire de tout de peur d'être obligé d'en pleurer",

but nowhere do we have the impression that his heart is breaking. Rather do we see him as the protagonist concerned with keeping the

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action moving. He is sad, undoubtedly: those who wear the motley usually are. But, unlike Shakespeare's Fools, he has not seen Lear and Hamlet. Figaro is witty, the life and soul of the party. Lear's Fool is the life and soul of a shipwreck.

Unlike Figaro, Lear's Fool does not need to start an intrigue. His task is to parry the blows of one already under way. He pines for the absent Cordelia, he grieves to see his master reduced to dire straits. Yet a merry quip must hide the broken heart, for this is an English Fool, bearing out the remark of, among many, Monsieur P.F.Cardi, who wrote(1):

"Pour devenir Anglais, riez quand vous avez envie de pleurer -----".

The humble Fool sees the truth which to Lear is not yet apparent (2):

"Then they for sudden joy did weep
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep,
And go the fools among".

What sort of Fool is this who can see before his master does the strength from which Goneril and Regan are to work? It is a sublime Fool, one who sees the truth of things and

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1. "Regard sur l'Outre-Manche".1945.p.61.
2. Act I.sciv.

wishes he did not:

"Prithee, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy fool to lie: I would fain learn to lie".

He would fain not be able to see that it is the cart which is drawing the horse, that Lear is but Lear's shadow, an obedient father and a slave. Throughout this scene (1) he is the counterbalance to Lear's "blindness" (2). This illustrates what Shelley meant when he said that the blending of comedy and tragedy was open in point of practice to great abuse, and that it should always aim, as here, to be:

"universal, ideal and sublime" (3).

This is not merely comedy; it is comic genius. The two are by no means the same. When the Fool replies (4) to Kent's question:

"Where learned you this, fool?"

by saying:

"Not i' the stocks, fool",

it is merely

comedy, because Kent is at that moment in the stocks. But when (5) the same Fool is trying his utmost to

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1. Act I.sc.iv.
2. Cp. André Gide.
3. "Defence of Poetry".
4. Act II.sc.iv.
5. Act I.sc.iv.

divert the half-demented king, it is comic genius. There is the utmost pathos in Lear's answer to the question of why the seven stars are no more than seven:

"Because they are not eight?".

That is the tentative reply of one Fool answering another:

"Yes, indeed; thou wouldst make a good fool!"

Thus we find wit on the one hand, and passion on the other:

"O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven.

Keep me in temper. I would not be mad".

As

Hazlitt remarked on this very topic(1):

"Lear and the Fool are the sublimest instance I know of passion and wit united, or of imagination unfolding the most tremendous sufferings and of burlesque on passion playing with it, aiding and relieving its intensity by the most pointed, but familiar and indifferent illustrations of the same thing ~~in~~ different objects and on a meaner scale".

Now that is true. It is also true that the role of the Fool has been omitted, mutilated or, at best, misunderstood in some French translations and adaptations of "King Lear"(2)

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1. "Lectures on the English Comic Writers".1819.p.41.

2. Beginning with that of J-F.Ducis, for example(1783).

If the French were as convinced as Hazlitt and Shelley of the importance of the comedy in the play, they would understand the Fool.

If the comedy in "King Lear" consisted solely in eating and drinking (which great tragic heroes are debarred from doing) and if this had no direct bearing on the plot, there might be some excuse for omitting it. The comedy in question, however, is of a much deeper order than that, and cannot be omitted. Lear and the Fool do not exist side by side; they are inextricably linked. The Fool is not an irrelevant role to be included or left out at will, but an essential part of the drama. He is more successfully interwoven into the plot of "King Lear" than the grave-diggers are into "Hamlet". Yet the latter are idolized in France, the former often is scorned.

On the whole, "Macbeth" has been better appreciated in France than has "King Lear". The only aspect of "Macbeth" to have attracted constant adverse criticism is the episode of the drunken porter, which is generally thought by French critics (1) to interrupt the solemnity of the murder scene and what

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1. Among them Voltaire.

follows. We have already in this chapter suggested one possible reason for the inclusion of this scene(1) and there are at least two others.

The more simple of the two is the suggestion of "comic relief". In Act II.sc.ii., Duncan has been murdered, and the scene ends, when the knocking is heard at the south entry, with Macbeth's cry:

"Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!".

A few lines after the porter's contribution, Macduff discovers the body of the murdered king, but these few lines, between passages of terror, contain a rough sort of comedy. Perhaps the audiences of Shakespeare's day liked to laugh as often as they could during a tragedy, as English audiences still do today. Thus, Shakespeare, if that be true, would include this passage as an interlude of light relief in an otherwise gruesome play.

French critics would have been better pleased if Shakespeare had omitted it, and kept the grim horror moving in some other way. They have not generally favoured (2) the idea of the contrast between comedy and tragedy, which Monsieur Michel Saint-Denis (3) thought to be one of the most prominent characteristics of the Englishman.

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1. Namely, to provide a role for a favourite actor, possibly Robert Armin.
 2. Théophile Gautier was one exception. See the footnote to page 90.
 3. See p.68, note 1.

Thomas de Quincey, in his essay "On the knocking at the gate in 'Macbeth'"(1) does not make special reference to this use of opposition and contrast because he feels it to be:

"tolerably obvious to all who are accustomed to reflect on what they read".

According to that judgment the majority of Frenchmen who have witnessed this play are only now beginning to reflect on it, for, until recent years, most of them saw the knocking as a vulgar piece of irrelevant obscenity.

Yet the remaining reason seems the most imaginative of all. It is the one which de Quincey himself prefers in his essay. De Quincey explains that from his boyhood days he had always felt a great perplexity on one point in "Macbeth": the knocking at the gate. This, in some way, had an unaccountable effect on his feelings, and seemed to reflect back upon the murder a peculiar awfulness and a depth of solemnity. If it does this, it is capital dramatic writing. How does Shakespeare manage to make us believe this? De Quincey continues:

"Yet, however obstinately I endeavoured with my understanding to comprehend this, for many years I never could see why it should produce such an effect".

Neither have the French students of Shakespeare been able to

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1. In: "The London Magazine". October 1823.

comprehend why it should. De Quincey, however, overcame his difficulty in a way that the French by their nature cannot yet adopt. He writes:

"The mere understanding, however useful and indispensable, is the meanest faculty in the human mind and the most to be distrusted -----".

That is contrary to the belief of the descendants of Descartes who will in no wise agree with de Quincey's view. But is he not correct? He did not, as he pointed out, suggest that the understanding was not supreme in everyday life, but in philosophic and literary matters he felt that the understanding should often take second place to some other faculty.

In the case of "Macbeth" the understanding would dictate that our sympathy should be with the murdered rather than the murderer. Yet Shakespeare must make us sympathize with Macbeth (1). Unless we understand Macbeth's feelings after he has committed the murder, much of what follows loses its effect. Banquo's ghost would hold no terror if Macbeth behaved like some swaggering Don Juan.

Macbeth, however, is transfigured at the end of Act II.sc.ii. Shakespeare shows us how he has forgotten his own character to become a sort of devil. How is this to be emphasized by Shakespeare? To

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1. A sympathy of interest, as de Quincey was careful to point out, not one of pity or approbation.

illustrate. Shakespeare's method, de Quincey shows how a certain state of being is at no time more marked than at the exact moment at which it ceases. For instance, the silence attending the funeral of a great national idol is at no time more apparent than when the wheels begin to turn again and normal life is resumed. Or we might say that at no time is a sunny day appreciated as such until the first drops of rain begin to fall.

"Reaction" is the word de Quincey uses to sum up this feeling. In "Macbeth", then, we are at no time more aware of the darkness of Macbeth's deed than when "reaction" begins and the porter appears (1) to say:

"Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate -----".

It was Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch who added, making fast the link with the previous scene:

"Aye, and that, my good man, is just what you are!".

This porter knows nothing of Macbeth's plans, which is bad drama in terms of French appreciation, and therefore yet another reason for leaving him out. But rather than turn the porter into a "confident", let us accept, as Mr.W.H.Hadow has suggested (2), the living truth that those on the edge
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1. Act III.sc.i.

2. "English Association Pamphlets". no.31. February 1915.

of the crater often know nothing of what is happening nearby. This principle of "reaction" is not something which can be perceived at once by the understanding. But it can, by adopting de Quincey's method, be felt and then understood gradually. The vulgarity of the porter's comedy seems comparatively unimportant when a broader interpretation is available, and available without in any way mutilating Shakespeare's text.

Much of what has been written in this chapter about Lear's Fool and Macbeth's porter might apply equally to the other two problem passages to be dealt with: the gravediggers in "Hamlet", and the drinking-song in "Othello".

One who disagrees with the majority of French critics(1) on the topic of the gravediggers in "Hamlet" is Professor Louis Cazamian, who has pointed out(2) that it is valid to look for humour in "Hamlet", except that this raises the objection of casting around for a fresh point of view on the most "scholar-ridden" of texts. However that may be, the scene of the gravediggers(3), whether Shakespeare inserted it as profound philosophy or hasty padding, has become the play as far as France is concerned(4),

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1. Some of them even convinced Garrick that he should omit the gravediggers in his presentation of the play.

2. Rice Institute Pamphlets. July 1937. Reprinted in "L'Humour de Shakespeare". Chapter XI. 1945.

3. Act V. sc. i.

4. F. Sarcey. "Quarante ans de théâtre". vol. 3. 1900. p. 358.

not because it is considered great drama, but because so much controversy has raged over this one scene that the others seem of minor importance by comparison.

The quarto text points to the most likely reading when it refers to the "goodmen delvers" not as gravediggers, but as clowns. That seems a wise interpretation. These are philosophical clowns withal, but clowns nevertheless. There has been little comic relief in the first four acts, although Hamlet and Polonius have provided some. Now, in between the news of Ophelia's death by drowning and her funeral comes this interlude of comic relief.

Some will say here that the same argument might apply to the other two instances of comedy in tragedy already discussed, but, unlike the role of Lear's Fool and the knocking at the gate in "Macbeth", the comedy here is incidental rather than necessary to the plot. It is comedy rather than tragic humour, even though Guizot gave(1) as an example of comedy linked to tragedy the fact that the gravediggers are digging Ophelia's grave. But Act V of "Hamlet" could begin as well at the point where Hamlet and

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1. "De Shakespeare et de la Poésie Dramatique".
1822.p.144.

Horatio notice the approaching funeral procession, and nothing essential to the plot would be lost, whereas if Act II.sc.iii. of "Macbeth" were to begin with Lennox's:

"Good morrow, noble sir",
or if the Fool
were left out of "King Lear" the same could not be said.

The quodlibets of the gravediggers have approximately as much connection with "Hamlet" as the opening lines of "Romeo and Juliet" (1) have with the rest of that play. It is a lightening of the load, a form of comedy which, as Sir John Gielgud has said with reference to Chekhov (2) makes the burden easier to bear. We are treated to some "crowner's quest-law", a conundrum, a song or two, a pint of beer in the offing, dramatic irony and, above all, the "hair-splitting" which causes Hamlet to say:

"How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card or equivocation will undo us".

No doubt

these two clowns were philosophers behind their rough exterior, but that does not entitle us to dig even deeper than the gravediggers in an attempt to unearth profound philosophy.

Like many things in Shakespeare's

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1. See note 1, p.17.

2. "Shakespeare Survey".vol.4.1951.p.104.

plays it is much simpler than that. This verbal jesting must have come as second nature to Shakespeare and he had of a necessity to put a quota in "Hamlet". This was very improper, no doubt, in terms of French seventeenth-century tragedy, but not in terms of equivalent English tragedy. Shakespeare is alleged by French critics to have committed a fault in thus mixing his comedy and tragedy, but the two genres together are often as essential to an English play(1) as are the two wheels to a bicycle.

We wrote a few lines above that the scene of the gravediggers was not essential to the plot of "Hamlet". On the contrary, now, the drinking bout(2) in "Othello" is essential to the plot. Some French critics may disagree, hinting that Shakespeare spoiled a promising tragedy by this sudden reversal to his old habits. It seems, however, that it was here(3) not so much a question of habit as of necessity.

Immediately before the drinking scene, Iago has put forward his thoughts plainly in a soliloquy(4) which

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1. Cp., for example, one of the most popular plays of recent years: "The Holly and the Ivy" by Mr. Wynyard Browne. There again tragedy (the tragedy of an elderly minister of the Church who can neither understand nor help his own children) is offset by comedy (the comedy of two Irish aunts).
2. Act II.sc.iii.
3. Unlike the brief appearance of the Clown in Act III.sc.iv.
4. The last speech of Act II.sc.i.

is generally overlooked. Coleridge spoke of the motiveless malignity of Iago, but possibly we are to take this as his motive, however weak it may be. Iago feels no love for Othello who has preferred one Michael Cassio as his lieutenant. Now, either justifiably or through powerful auto-suggestion, Iago adds:

"For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leapt into my seat: the thought whereof
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards;
And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife".

Iago had begun this soliloquy by believing that Cassio loved Desdemona. His plan, therefore, will be to make Othello believe in Cassio's guilt, thus bringing about the desired end without himself being apparently involved in the affair.

"I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip"

says

Iago, and:

"make the Moor thank me, love me and reward me".

Cassio being a worthy man, it will be difficult to:

"abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb".

Good

Michael is not likely of his own accord to run foul

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of his general. Therefore he must be made to do so. Iago's method is not original, but nevertheless effective:

"If I can fasten but one cup upon him,
With that which he hath drunk tonight
already,
He'll be as full of quarrel and offence
As my young mistress' dog" (1).

How better to produce the atmosphere of drink than with a merry song and the clink of a cannikin? this will be particularly apt from the pen of an author who belongs to the nation which is, so he tells us:

"most potent in potting".

Thus, Iago promptly shifts the scene to some Warwickshire inn with his song:

"King Stephen was a worthy peer,
His breeches cost him but a crown;
He held them sixpence all too dear,
With that he call'd the tailor lown.

He was a wight of high renown,
And thou art but of low degree:
'Tis pride that pulls the country down;
Then take thine auld cloak about thee".

This is a far cry from the central

theme of "Othello", from him who:

"like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe",

from what the

French cling to in an attempt to understand
Shakespeare. But it is no use linking Othello's
action with that of Racinian heroines who, like him:

"demand that demi-devil

Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body".

Othello

refers only to Iago, not to the Gods or to "Vénus à
sa proie attachée".

It is better to link the end of
"Othello" to the drinking scene, for that is the real
beginning of the end. It is that scene which sets in
motion the jealousy and disappointment of Othello and
leads in the end to Desdemona's death. It was Bacchus
rather than Venus who, through Iago and, unwittingly,
Cassio, brought about Othello's downfall.

There, then, are four "problems",
one from each of Shakespeare's quartet of tragedies,
together forming an essay in interpretative criticism.

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The interpretations are not the only ones, but the method must be agreed upon, even if others have different results to put forward. Each interpretation has the merit of analysing Shakespeare through the medium of imagination, by which the plays were conceived, rather than directly through the understanding.

Thus far, however, we have not followed the lead (1) given by Walpole's aphorism:

"This world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel",

and so appreciate Shakespeare's mixture of comedy and tragedy "per se". As stated already (2), the French have never liked this mixing of the two genres.

In aesthetic French literature, therefore, comedy and tragedy have virtually always, since the beginning of the seventeenth century, been carefully separated. Yet French literature is to be a faithful mirror to Nature. Now are these two points compatible with each other? They are within measure, inasmuch as French tragedy faithfully mirrors certain aspects of one side of human life and French comedy certain aspects of the other. But they are not inasmuch as life itself has no such careful division. Comedy and

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1. Chapter 4.

2. Also in chapter 4.

tragedy exist side by side. Sometimes the mixture is obvious, in hospitals and registrars' waiting-rooms and on railway stations. Sometimes it is not so obvious, but the fact remains that the families living in one street will never be entirely happy or entirely sad at the same moment. Unlike Aristophanes, Plautus and Terence who wrote comedies, and unlike Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles and Seneca who wrote tragedies, Nature mingles the two in her work.

Now is it illogical to have comedy and tragedy together? In life, our eyes move quickly from the one to the other. Our minds may move just as rapidly when meeting the two in a Shakespearean tragedy. It was no doubt "fit" that Ancient Greece should separate the two, but it becomes increasingly apparent that life since then has gradually become so complicated that the model will no longer serve. That is not to deny the greatness of Greek literature, but rather to emphasize its uniqueness. It is Shakespeare who is "fittest" at this present time, and many French critics are admitting this point of view. Professor Louis Cazamian, at the end of his "L'Humour de Shakespeare" (1) writes:

"Le plaisir et la peine sont universels, et

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1. 1945.

inévitablement liés. Il est chimérique de vouloir détruire, ou nier, cette liaison".

For this reason, that Shakespeare portrays concurrently the two inextricably interwoven feelings of pleasure and pain, many will agree with Monsieur Jean-Louis Barrault that Shakespeare is:

"un besoin de la France".

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Chapter 9

French "Misconceptions" of Shakespeare's tragedy

There is one "misconception" in France, different in each case, about each of the four great tragedies of Shakespeare. Two have been discussed already: "Othello" and "King Lear" (1). Now we are to discuss how the French character and the approach of that character to drama have given rise to the other two, affecting "Hamlet" and "Macbeth".

(a). "Hamletism" in France

When Professor L. Cazamian stated, as noted in the previous chapter (2), that "Hamlet" was the most "scholar-ridden" of texts, he was uttering an unfortunate truth. It is impossible now for anyone to approach the play without some reference to the plethora of criticism which has grown around it.

France is no exception to this state of affairs, and, through the years, the force of "Hamletism" in that country has become one of major importance. It has done this in other countries, also, notably in England, Germany and the United States of America. Yet in none of these is the position quite

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1. In chapter 8.

2. p.169.

the same as it is in France. In England "Hamletism", if it is a force at all, is a purely literary one, counterbalanced in real life by innate energy. In Germany, it finds a closer acceptance, but is confined to sporadic outbursts (1) rather than to an undercurrent of life. In the United States of America, it is yet one more diamond in Shakespeare's crown.

In France, on the other hand, the echoes of Hamlet seem to stem from life itself, and nowhere is "nothingness" a more potent factor. Hamlet the man rather than "Hamlet" the play has attracted French attention most. Rarely does one find a book like "Hamlet, ou les personnages du fils" (2), in which the author, Monsieur Jean Paris, strives to reinsert Hamlet into the framework of the play. The view expressed is so full of common-sense as to be almost revolutionary. For instance, not many of us who pride ourselves on our knowledge of Shakespeare could honestly say that we were aware that Hamlet's father had once slain the father of Prince Fortinbras, who succeeds to the throne of Denmark at the end of the play. Yet the information is there, within the first hundred lines of Shakespeare's text:

" ----- our last king,
Whose image even but now appear'd to us,

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1. "Werther", for instance.

2. 1953.

Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,
 Thereto prick'd on by a most emulate pride,
 Dar'd to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet-
 For so this side of our known world esteem'd him-
 Did slay this Fortinbras -----".

Or

who would now agree that Laertes was as equally justified in revenging his father as Hamlet was his own? To advance such an opinion now is to pass in the eyes of the majority as incompetent, as one to whom "aesthetic criticism" is unknown.

Shakespeare has paid the price of his fame, and nowhere more than in "Hamlet". But we need not toil after philosophy when there is poetry to be enjoyed. The British Academy Lecture in 1942, given by Mr.C.S. Lewis, was called:

"Hamlet, the Prince or the Poem?"

and the speaker had no doubts at all in concluding that the poetry is more important than the character.

Not everyone in France, of course, will agree that "Hamlet" finds a sounding-board in the French character. Monsieur Pierre Messiaen, in his notes on the play (1) thinks that "Hamlet" is the play

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1. "William Shakespeare". vol."Les Tragédies". 1946.

of Shakespeare's least in keeping with "l'esprit français":

"Que signifie ce prince vêtu de noir qui plaisante le spectre de son père, tient à la main une tête de mort?".

When Monsieur Messiaen poses this question, he seems to be making an attempt to see the play itself, clearing aside the myth which his countrymen have made of it. On that assessment, one can only agree. Whatever meaning be attached to "l'esprit français", the form of "Hamlet" is no more classical than Hamlet himself is Gallic. Yet the philosophical myth is there, and seems with very few exceptions to be losing none of its fascination for the French. How then does this play, described by Monsieur Messiaen as "un-French", come to touch a chord in the French mind? Why can we speak of a strain of "Hamletism" in French life and literature?

Outside observers have traced the strain back as far as Villon, linking his name with that of Hamlet on grounds of the "frissons de mort" apparent in both. It is, however, Montaigne who first uses a phrase which might very well describe Hamlet(1):

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1. Quoted by Monsieur P-M. Richard. "'Hamlet'. Tragédie de l'indécision". In: "Le Magasin du spectacle". no.7. 1946. p.27.

"Nous avons pour nostre part l'irrésolution, l'incertitude, le deuil, la sollicitude des choses à venir voire aprez nostre vie".

That sums up nicely the problems of Hamlet: on the one hand lack of resolve, and on the other preoccupation with death. Neither Villon nor Montaigne could have been influenced by Shakespeare, but it is not with influences that we are concerned, even with later names, but with tracing what might be called a "brotherhood of Hamletism" in France.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, with the growth of Romanticism, the idea of making Hamlet a universal figure and of identifying one's self with him became a preoccupation. To the elder Hugo, Hamlet's struggle was the eternal struggle of Prometheus. To the younger Hugo he represented the everlasting conflict between Will and Fate.

"Hamlet" the play reduced to Hamlet the prince was further reduced to Hamlet's soliloquies. "To be or not to be", that was the question. Hamlet was not only the Prince of Denmark uncertain of whether or how to revenge his father, but also all men conscious of not being able to act

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as they should. To go or not to go, to do or not to do, to love or not to love, these were the questions for the mid-nineteenth century in France. Another of the Romantics, Théophile Gautier, called Hamlet the "Orestes of the North" in that he, also, had a murdered father to revenge and in so doing was driven to madness.

In Baudelaire, particularly, the strain of nothingness is most noticeable:

"Maudit soit à jamais le rêveur inutile
Qui voulut le premier dans sa stupidité
S'éprenant d'un problème insoluble et
stérile

Aux choses de l'amour mêler l'honnêteté"(1).

Now

the "tedium of life" shown here, and practically everywhere in Baudelaire is very close to that shown or feigned by Hamlet. If "revenge" be substituted for "love" in the above quotation, it fits exactly the problem with which Hamlet is faced: a spirit of revenge tempered by social consciousness.

With Hugo and Baudelaire, and with the generation of Mallarmé and Rimbaud, Hamlet fever in France reached its height. Mallarmé thought that "Hamlet" was the only "pure" drama because its

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1. Quoted by Monsieur René Taupin. "The Myth of Hamlet in France in Mallarmé's Generation". In: "The Modern Language Quarterly". 1953.

central figure was confronted by the question of existence itself. This point of view ignores the other twenty-two characters in the play, plus one ghost, sundry players, ambassadors, Lords and Ladies, and messengers. They are not concerned with existence. We have often heard of "Hamlet" without the Prince of Denmark, but here we have things reversed: the Prince of Denmark without "Hamlet".

Mallarmé, a teacher of English, was echoed by Anatole France who asserted that he would not learn a foreign language lest it should mar the use of his own, and who seems to have shared with Béranger and Beaumarchais an English vocabulary limited to "God-dam". Yet Anatole France showed himself to be one of many who towards the close of the nineteenth century were eager to identify themselves and their fellow-men with this Prince:

"Vous n'avez pas vieilli d'une heure en trois siècles. Votre âme a l'âge de chacune de nos âmes. Nous vivons ensemble, Prince Hamlet, et vous êtes ce que nous sommes, un homme au milieu du mal universel"(1).

This may in a sense be interpretative criticism, but it is questionable. That is generally so where a critic begins by talking of Hamlet and ends by talking about himself. For while it is probably true of Anatole France, as of the rest of us, that he was "a

1. Quoted by Professor R.L. Graeme Ritchie. "Anatole France". 1928. p.58.

man in the midst of universal evil", that is not a thought which "Hamlet" can inspire; it must be a mood in the reader's mind to begin with. Nor is the judgment more true of Hamlet than of Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Timon or any other of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. Fanciful criticism hung on a convenient peg may sound well, but it has little real value when it veers away from, in this case, Shakespeare's text. We would rather see "Hamlet" styled with the sub-title: "or the Absent-Minded One" (1) than see some Orestes/Prometheus/ Hamlet tacked on to a graveyard scene and masquerading as a Shakespeare tragedy.

Mention of a theatre billing recalls the interesting fact that if Mallarmé and Anatole France attended a performance of "Hamlet" on the French stage they would probably see it in the adaptation of Morand and Schwob, with Sarah Bernhardt in the title role. This production opened in 1886 (2) and it is generally thought that Sarah Bernhardt did much to kill the myth of Hamlet in France by making of him a resourceful, resolute avenger. This is the view that Monsieur René Taupin takes in his article (3), adding further that two World Wars have completed the destruction of the myth.

It must be made plain that "Hamlet"

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1. Which it was given, according to Mallarmé, by a French provincial impresario.
 2. When Mallarmé was 44, and Anatole France, like Sarah Bernhardt, 42.
 3. Quoted on page 184.

did not originate "Hamletism"; it merely acted as fuel for a fire already burning. Yet one wishes that we could have had as big a blaze with more convincing conclusions. The French have had subtle reasons for liking "Hamlet"; that they should have been frequently questionable is, in this instance, unfortunate, and adds nothing to the real appreciation of Shakespeare.

Many Frenchmen are coming to regard "nothingness" as a bad influence, and now prefer enthusiasm in the manner of Falstaff. If this were to become general, we might then be able to speak of a Shakespearean influence on France.

(b). "Macbeth": Jansenism and Classicism?

The "misconception" concerning "Macbeth" relates to the construction and dramatic force of the play. Here the "misconception" is really only partial, because we are prepared to encourage the idea of a "classical" form if it helps to better understanding. We regret, however, the suggestions of

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Jansenist philosophy which have sprung therefrom.

It was pointed out in the chapter on "Shakespeare and Corneille" (1) that "Macbeth" was the tragedy of Shakespeare's which most resembled classical tragedy in its form. French critics have been quick to seize on this, particularly Paul Stapfer (2). But, some critics will say, there are seventeen years of history compressed into the events of the play, which themselves need nine days to unfold. Yet the whole takes place on the stage in just over two hours. Shakespeare, then, breaks the unity of time in two ways, by his use of "double-time", added to which we move south to England for a small part of the play (3) and thus destroy the unity of place also.

That does not suggest classical form, but if, as here, the end of the drama is logical and the action moves rapidly, questions of unities are forgotten. This is the remarkable point about "Macbeth" in France: that it has been regarded as of classical form despite the fact that it is not strictly so.

Yet the view is a justifiable one. "Macbeth" is approximately half the length of "Hamlet", and Shakespeare had perforce to waste no time in

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1. Chapter 5. See particularly the context of note 2, p.91, and note 3, p.95.

2. "Shakespeare et l'Antiquité". 1890. vol.II. p.224.

3. Act IV.sc.iii.

creating the events leading up to Macbeth's punishment. By the end of Act I.sc.iii., we know that of the three titles: Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, promised to Macbeth by the weird sisters, the first two have already been conferred on him and the possibility of the third is playing havoc with his imaginative mind.

The next scene puts obstacles in Macbeth's way, for Duncan names his eldest son, Malcolm, (who will succeed to the throne on Duncan's death), Prince of Cumberland.

Act I.sc.iv. is the scene in which Lady Macbeth receives the letter and in which Duncan's death-warrant is signed. In the following scene Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle, and in the one immediately following (Act I.sc.vii.) his murder is assured.

It needs only two scenes of Act II for the murder to be committed, and a further one for it to be discovered. Now only Banquo troubles Macbeth, and he is murdered in Act III.sc.iii. Preparations now give way to prosperity, or so Macbeth and his wife think. But it is now Banquo, or rather his ghost, who works against Macbeth (Act III.sc.iv.), and prosperity in turn gives way to punishment.

It needs only Macduff to hear

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(Act IV.sc.iii) of the death of his wife and children, murdered on Macbeth's orders, and that punishment is assured for Act V.

With the possible exception of parts of Act IV, the whole drama is full of rapid action, and sufficiently rapid to hold French attention. Victorien Sardou realized this, and although he was not a wholehearted admirer of Shakespeare, the play fascinated him as a result of its movement (1).

As far as the construction is concerned, then, it is apparent that "Macbeth" may be regarded as having a "classical" form. There, however, the similarity ends. When it comes to the motivation of the drama Shakespeare and French Classical tragedy adopt different techniques. Although few French critics will admit this, "Macbeth" is not a Jansenist tragedy (as Philarète Chasles thought it) in which the Fates are supreme (2). The witches have been suggested as convenient Fates, but the fact remains that while Phèdre and Andromaque are victims, Macbeth and Lady

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1. Monsieur Georges Mouly recounts this in "Sardou et Shakespeare". "La Revue de France". 1st.Nov.1932. p.82.
 2. Similarly, F. Guizot had said of "King Lear", in a Notice preceding his translation of the play (1821), that it showed Lear, Gloucester, Kent, Edgar and Cordelia labouring under the yoke of "fatalité". (pp.10-12).

Macbeth are criminals. The victims in "Macbeth" are secondary characters: Duncan, Banquo and their families. Macbeth seems undecided, but he wants the crown of Scotland, and he wants it at once. There is never any doubt about that. He will not remain static as Phèdre does, awaiting whatever the Fates decree.

"But who did ever in French authors see
The comprehensive English energy?" (1).

There

lies a major difference between French Classical tragedy and Shakespeare. Shakespeare was English, and so he fills Macbeth with energy. Macbeth is resolved on Duncan's murder long before he writes to his wife. Already he yields to:

"----- that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of Nature" (2).

The murder,

though as yet "fantastical", so shakes Macbeth's
"single state of man" :

"That Function is smother'd in surmise
And nothing is, but what is not" (3).

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1. Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon (1633-1685).
"Essay on translated verse". line 51. "Poems". ed.
Chalmers. vol.viii.
2. Act I.sc.iii.line 150.
3. Ibid.line 157.

That is to say that his powers of present action are crushed by the temptations of the future. Macbeth is afloat on the sea that will engulf him.

With this point of view, Mr.E.E.Williams, who compared "Macbeth" with the "Oedipus Tyrannus" of Sophocles and the "Athalie" of Racine (1), presumably would not agree, for he wrote:

"In each tragedy a strongly unified action is centred on the fulfilment of a prophecy that influences the actions of the protagonist in such a way that he precipitates the accomplishment of a prediction he wishes to avert".

Our dissention is with the last four words of this quotation, for Macbeth does not try to avert the accomplishment of the prediction. Unlike Oedipus and Athalie, Macbeth does not suffer from dramatic irony. When he acts, he acts in full knowledge of the relevant facts. Naturally, he tries to stave off the final punishment, but that is not the same as trying to avert the accomplishment of the prediction of the witches. Macbeth gives no signs in the scenes prior to his punishment of being in some diabolical grip:

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1. "Tragedy of Destiny". 1940. p.32.

"I am settled"

he says (1),

and bend up

Each corporal agent to this terrible feat".

Indeed,

Macbeth calls Duncan's murder a "terrible feat", but this does not prove any reluctance to carry out the deed. This he does with malice aforethought. It is he and his wife, not the weird sisters, who drive the plot forward. As befits one of his race, Macbeth is the "chief engineer" - in this case of his own downfall.

In fact, one might apply specifically to Macbeth what Alfred Mézières wrote(2) about Elizabethan drama in general:

"A chacun selon ses oeuvres: tel est le principe moral qui domine le théâtre anglais du seizième siècle. Chaque homme est l'ouvrier de sa propre destinée et recueille, dès cette vie, le fruit des bonnes ou des mauvaises actions qu'il a commises".

Thus, Macbeth might say with

Mr.W.E.Henley:

"I am the master of my fate

I am the captain of my soul".

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1. Act II.sc.i.line 93.

2. "Shakespeare, ses oeuvres et ses critiques".
2nd.edition.1865.p.123. (1st.edition 1860).

The question of destiny is insoluble. Who knows how many lives have been altered by the missing of a bus, the tying of a shoelace or the buying of a newspaper? To what can we attribute these actions?:

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them how we will" (1).

But,
shifting the emphasis from the "shaping" to the
"rough-hewing":

"Men are some time masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
But in ourselves". (2).

In other words, we reap according to how we sow (it is imperative, at least, that we should believe that we do), which no doubt led Lamartine to speak of the "morality" of "Macbeth".

The protagonist, then, receives not so much what the Fates decree as what he deserves. This was the view of Professor A.C. Bradley (3):

"He (Bradley) sees the men who move through

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1. "Hamlet". Act V.sc.i.
2. "Julius Caesar". Act I.sc.ii.
3. Here summarized by one of Professor Bradley's disciples, Professor H.B. Charlton. "Shakespearian Tragedy". 1948. p.4.

them (Shakespeare's plays) as if they were real human beings struggling through a world which seems in moral substance very much like our own. He finds that the sequence of action by which they move to their destiny appears as the intelligible outcome of the particular impulses and motives which give to each of them his distinctive personality, and which operate within these characters as mankind's accumulated experience of humanity has found they tend to operate in real life. So Bradley is preoccupied", continues Professor Charlton, "though not exclusively occupied, with Shakespeare's portrayal of his hero's character as an autonomous dynamic element, forging that man's future in its interplay with fate and circumstance. He finds this the most palpable clue to Shakespeare's power of infusing into his tragedies the sense of universality and inevitability -----".

As for France, this mention of "universality" again discloses a strange fact about French appreciation of Shakespeare's plays in general and of "Macbeth" in particular. The very elements, the elements with which Professor Bradley was preoccupied, that make "Macbeth" universal and therefore acceptable to the French in the first instance, do not in fact remain as the real basis of French approbation of the play. That is to say that Shakespeare created Macbeth as an "autonomous dynamic

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element" set in a drama which revealed his character in its "interplay with fate and circumstance". This is as universal as life itself. Therefore the play is acceptable to the French critics. Whereupon they promptly turn "Macbeth into a masculine version of Phèdre, hedged around and governed by the Fates.

Whether this shows that "Macbeth" is universal or the opposite would be a most difficult matter to decide. What is clear is that the traditional theory in England is that Shakespeare's protagonists suffer as a result of their own actions or thoughts, while in France they are, like the protagonists of Racine, made to suffer by the Gods.

May criticism be, therefore, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder?

The next seven chapters will deal with more pleasant things than graveyards and murderers. For it is time now to turn to the question of Shakespeare's comedy, so that we may see how it has been received in France, and thus discover how this reception again reveals differences and similarities, this time between French and English theories of comedy.

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Part III

The French Approach to
Shakespeare's Comedy

Chapter 10

Of English and French Comedy and some differences between them

Early in chapter 4 it was stated that Shakespeare is to the French primarily a writer of tragedies. It is now time to substantiate that remark by a more detailed discussion. For while a considerable number of Frenchmen may find something of interest in Shakespeare's tragedies, few have found anything outstanding in his comedies.

The first point to decide is: what, in general terms, is comedy in England, and what is it in France? For whereas no definition seemed to be needed for tragedy, which has a universal basis, there is a real need for a definition of comedy, which has no universal basis. In addition to being based on gesture, word or situation, as well as on character, comedy is intrinsically a more complex phenomenon than tragedy. One realizes that comedy changes not only from country to country, but also from district to district, from town to town and from generation to generation.

Definitions of comedy are not lacking, particularly ⁱⁿ Anglo-French circles. Many

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philosophers have expressed opinions on the matter, the chief merit of their attempts being, according to Jean-Paul Richter (1), that the results were in many instances themselves comic. All may be correct in some measure; none is absolute. Since Aristotle and Plato philosophized on the comedies of Aristophanes, it has been easier to say what comedy has been, rather than what it should be.

Mr.Nevill Coghill, writing on "The Basis of Shakespearean Comedy" (2), traces the progress of such definitions. The earliest belong to three Latin grammarians of the fourth century A.D. The first, Evanthius (3), spoke thus:

"As between Tragedy and Comedy, while there are many distinguishing marks, the first is this: in Comedy the characters are men of middle fortune, the dangers they run neither serious nor pressing, their actions lead to happy conclusions; but in Tragedy things are just the opposite ----- in Comedy life is to be grasped, in Tragedy run away from ---- Comedy is made up of feigned actions, Tragedy fetched more often from a historical belief".

Evanthius was followed in turn by

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1. Willard Smith."The Nature of Comedy".1930.p.9.
2. In:"English Association Essays and Studies". New Series. vol.3. 1950.
3. Author of a Commentary on Terence.

Diomedes (1), who agreed with his fellow grammarian:

"Comedy differs from Tragedy in that in Tragedy heroes, generals and kings are introduced, in Comedy humble and private people. In the former, grief, exile and slaughter; in the latter, love-affairs and the abductions of maidens. Then, in the former, there are often and almost invariably sad endings to happy circumstances, and a discovery of former fortune and family taking an ill-turn ----- for sad things are the property of Tragedy".

The third of these fourth-century grammarians, Donatus, later sought to introduce a new note, at the same time dealing with broader issues than had the other two:

"Comedy is a tale containing various elements of the dispositions of town-dwelling and private people, to whom it is made known what is useful in life and what contrary and to be avoided".

For this present study, those three views on comedy are important in this respect: they show clearly that as early as the fourth century A.D. there were already in existence side by side the two strains of comedy which have since given rise to Shakespeare on the one hand (from the definitions of Evanthius and Diomedes) and Molière and Ben Jonson on the other (from the "what contrary and to be avoided" of Donatus). Hence, two veins of comedy now thought of as

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1. Author of an "Ars Grammatica" in 3 vols.

opposites ("romantic" and "satiric", Mr. Coghill calls them) derived in fact from the same parent stock.

In other words, in the fourth century A.D., if French comedy as typified by Molière, and English comedy as typified by Shakespeare, had existed, they would have been complementary and interchangeable rather than opposites and non-interchangeable.

After these fourth-century definitions we find no others until the thirteenth century when the matter was taken up again in France. Mathieu de Vendôme (1) suggested that comedies might be recognized negatively in that they lack the lofty grandeur of tragedy.

Again in the thirteenth century, Vincent de Beauvais (c.1190-c.1264) thought that comedy was a poem changing a sad beginning into a happy ending. This judgment is an important one, for Vincent referred constantly to many ancient authors whose work is now lost (2).

These were definitions which might be applied universally, for national comedy had not yet asserted itself.

If we trace now the development of medieval comedy (3), in England first of all, we find

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1. The chief works of this author appear in "Origines du Théâtre" by E. du Méril. 1849.
 2. L. Lalanne. "Dictionnaire Historique de la France". 1872. p.1806.
 3. See: Professor T.M. Parrott. "Shakespearean Comedy" 1949 (the essential of which is quoted in the following pages).

that the Miracle cycles of Chester, Coventry, Wakefield and York were popular about the third quarter of the fourteenth century. From the farce, the realistic language and the rustic shepherds of these Miracle plays developed at a later date the Bottoms and the Dogberrys of Shakespeare, and perhaps his drunken porters and his gravediggers as well.

About 1425, continues Professor Parrott, came the Morality plays, ethical and didactic sermons, with comedy more heightened than in the Miracle cycles, and with an increase of Rabelaisian language.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, the Moralities yielded in turn to a vague genre to which Collier gave the name "Interludes". In these, edification gave way to entertainment, largely in the style of Chaucer and the French farces. John Heywood (b.1497) was one of those who wrote in this vein, and his Interludes (1) served to show that characters could be drawn from life, that plays could amuse as well as teach and that they could be of an actable length.

During the Renaissance the influence of Latin comedy (particularly Plautus) was felt, and comedy became concerned properly with ridicule. But though the influence may have been Latin,

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1. For example: "The Play of the Weather", "The Play of Love", and "Johan Johan".

the plays were English in every other respect, plays like "Ralph Roister Doister" (c.1533) of Nicholas Udall (1506-1556), and "Gammer Gurton's Needle"(c.1575) reputedly by William Stevenson (1).

At that same time, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) in his "Defense of Poesie" (2) represented the general view of the humanists in their insistence on a moral aim:

"Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be: so that it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one" (3).

The influence of Plautus is still visible in Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors", but Ben Jonson was, of course, a more consistent exponent of the type of comedy envisaged by Sir Philip Sidney. In England, however, the strain was a dying one. The romantic vein of comedy, which had been laid low by the Renaissance, was to reassert itself. "La Celestina" became known in England about a quarter of the way through the sixteenth century, and in the English version (4) the love element, on which Shakespeare was

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1. At approximately the same time Jodelle's "Eugène" (1552) was published in France.
 2. Published posthumously in 1593.
 3. Quoted by Mr.R.B.Johnson. "Poetry and the Poets". 1926. p.20.
 4. "Calisto and Melibea", a unique copy of which is in the Bodleian.

to base all his comedies, was considerably heightened and the language refined. John Lyly carried on the refining process by excising horseplay and removing bawdy language. Lyly, who is thought to have been born in 1553 or 1554, was thus the last of the line of comic writers leading towards Shakespeare. The gentle humour of "Endymion" (1586) and "Galathea" (1587) was to become better known in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "As You Like It".

Now what of the position in France during the same period? (1). In the early stages the same strains were to be found in French comedy as in English comedy. The early "fabliaux" and the "Mystère et Miracles" (such as "Jeu de la Feuillée" and "Jeu de Robin et de Marion" of thirteenth-century Adam de la Halle) were closely related also to Shakespeare. One difference was that the emphasis in the French plays is often on physical deformity, which does not appear noticeably in the English texts of that time (2). The mental "deformities" of Alceste and Harpagon may have developed from the physical deformities of those early plays.

Little has come down to us, it

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1. See particularly: "The Nature of Comedy". Willard Smith. 1930.
2. For a comparison, see Professor Gayley's: "English Representative Comedies". 1903. vol.1.p.xxxvi.

appears, of fourteenth-century French comedy, but towards the end of it and throughout the fifteenth century, farce, comic moralities and "soties" (hardly a separate genre) were in existence. The fifteenth century was predominantly one of farce, but gradually it became evident that in France as in England, farce on the one hand was counterbalanced by moralizing on the other.

Although the Pléiade had declared in favour of imitations of Greek and Roman comedies, much of sixteenth-century French comedy is of the Italian (1) type (the Italians themselves being influenced by Plautus), involving intrigue, complicated plots, stock characters and boring dialogue. These comedies of intrigue were not as virile as the old French farces, and after the nine comedies in this vein of Larivey, a canon of St. Etienne de Troyes (c.1540-1611), the Italian strain gave way to the native one.

If there was any influence at work on French comedy during the early seventeenth century it came not from Shakespeare, but from Spain. Lope de Vega, Calderón and Tirso de Molina (themselves often "Shakespearean" in tone) were among those whose works were mirrored in writers like Mairet, Rotrou, Scarron

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1. Willard Smith. op.cit.p.18.

and Corneille.

More important than any influence, however, is the fact that in the early seventeenth century the "esprit latin" in French comedy triumphed over the "esprit gaulois". In England we saw that the romantic vein of comedy had first fallen into disuse and later reappeared. In France the reverse was true: it was the moral aspect which reasserted itself. Comedy sprang increasingly from character rather than from situation, and in Corneille's "Le Menteur" (1644) the source of the comedy lies, for the first time in French literature, in the moral constitution of the hero. Corneille's six earlier comedies had been very much in the farcical fashion which reminds one of Shakespeare.

In France as in England, then, the basic outline of comedy had now been established. Though the method was the same in each case, however, the emphasis was different. Molière's type of comedy, the satiric, persists in France to this day, whereas the romantic type has been seen there only occasionally, principally in the plays of Marivaux, Musset and Rostand.

In other words, whereas satiric comedy in England assumed a secondary role in deference

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to the more successful romantic variety, in France the position was the opposite. It was romantic comedy which lost ground, and the vein of satire which came to the fore. English and French comedy, which had for centuries been alike, in the early seventeenth century began to break away from each other. Just as Shakespeare's tragedy could have entered France unchallenged before 1636 ("Le Cid"), Shakespeare's comedy could have gone in before 1644 ("Le Menteur"). In both cases, French drama was to turn inwards towards the abstract, English drama outwards towards the concrete.

Having traced briefly the comedy of England and that of France up to the time of Shakespeare on the one hand and Molière on the other (1), we ought now to study what the different course adopted by each has meant in terms of Shakespeare's plays in France.

In the early stages of this development little attention was paid to his comedy. In the eighteenth century Voltaire thought it vulgar, La Place and Letourneur turned first to translating the tragedies, and Ducis ignored the comedies completely.

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1. These two names require in addition a chapter to themselves. See chapter 11.

Early in the nineteenth century attempts were made to estimate and analyze the merit of Shakespeare's comic genius. One attempt, that of Guizot (1), was not a particularly successful one, but not in the least surprising for a compatriot of Molière:

"'Timon d'Athènes' ----- est un essai dans ce genre savant où le ridicule naît du sérieux et qui constitue la grande comédie".

In other words, Timon was thought to be another Alceste whereas he is, in fact, much closer to Lear.

Another contemporary account is much more English in its outlook. Stendhal, ironically remarking in his notes on comedy and laughter (2) that:

"le rire n'est donc pas nécessaire pour faire une fort bonne comédie française",

had earlier

said (3):

"J'aime à trouver, quand je vais me délasser au théâtre, une imagination folle qui me fasse rire comme un enfant".

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1. "De Shakespeare et de la Poésie Dramatique". 1822. p.81.

2. Written between 1803 and 1823, mostly in the latter year, and not titled by Stendhal, but generally appearing (e.g. the "Divan" edition of 1930) under the editorial heading of "Molière, Shakespeare, la Comédie et le Rire". 1854 edition, p.29.

3. p.27.

Previously, only Beaumarchais had given a hint of this attitude, in his "Essai sur le Genre Dramatique Sérieux":

"La gaieté légère nous distrait; elle tire, en quelque façon, notre âme hors d'elle-même, et la répand autour de nous".

This was, and still is, an unusual view for a Frenchman trained on the "thoughtful laughter" of Molière to take (1).

That Shakespeare was the man to provide Stendhal's preferred type of non-intellectual amusement is obvious, despite the fact that, no matter how strict his criticism of him, Stendhal still gave pride of place in pure comedy to Molière. But there were reasons, principally language, temperament and training, why France as a whole did not agree with Stendhal's adoption of Shakespeare's comedies.

Later in the nineteenth century Philarette Chasles interpreted these comedies as bizarre tales of the middle-ages, and Faguet, with an observation similar to that of Guizot, saw Jaques as one of Shakespeare's finest comic characters. Even Victorien Sardou, whose personal approach to

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1. To take, that is, at the level of high rather than low comedy.

Shakespeare is to be commended, was unimpressed by Shakespeare's comedy (1), although he knew the English language well, whereas the "international" flavour of the comedy in "Don Quixote" managed to reach him even through a language he did not know.

In English comments of the nineteenth century the difference between English and French comedy is further heightened. Only Meredith supported the French idea of high comedy, and thus ignored the more kindly possibilities of laughter. Yet Shakespeare's laughter is, with one possible exception (2), kindly, and it is to be hoped that Meredith's role of propagandist had temporarily obscured his professed admiration for Shakespeare.

Much more typically English was the remark addressed by Charles Lamb to his friend Manning(3):

"What you assert concerning the actors of Paris, that they exceed our comedians 'bad as ours are', is impossible. Their fine gentlemen, in what is called genteel comedy, may possibly be more brisk and dégagé; but have any of them the power to move laughter in excess? Or can a Frenchman laugh? Can they batter at

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1. Georges Mouly. "Sardou et Shakespeare". In: "La Revue de France". 1st. November 1932.
2. Malvolio, in "Twelfth Night". See context of notes 2 and 3, p.236.
3. Quoted by Mr. George Gordon. "Shakespearean Comedy and other studies". 1944. p.4.

your judicious ribs till they shake, nothing loth to be shaken? This is John Bull's contention, and it shall be mine. You are Frenchified".

Manning was "Frenchified" in the same way that Meredith was: both were unable to laugh at farcical comedy. Yet although there were supporters of Meredith and Manning in this country, and of Beaumarchais and Stendhal in France, the two opposing national views of comedy were not reconciled.

In 1914, Mr. John Palmer was able to write in "Comedy" (1) that we English see little fun in Alceste, while to the French our Falstaff is merely a needlessly fat man. Mr. Palmer's "The Comic Characters of Shakespeare" (1946) shows no change of attitude on this point, and would be surprising if it did. We have already seen, in chapter 4, that while tragedy is "large in gesture and effect", comedy is "local", depends on detail and seeks to reproduce climates rather than actual predicaments.

It is true, however, that different brands of comedy have certain common denominators. For example, Molière, Shakespeare and Cervantes would all no doubt subscribe to the view of Mr. George Cowling (2):

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1. p.5.

2. "Shakespearean Comedy". In: "Shelley and other essays". 1936. p.109.

"To the comic writer life is laughable, because this is an imperfect world. Think of what life might be, and compare it with what it is, and the contrast is ludicrous. And so, with laughter at the imperfections and defects of life, he humiliates our arrogance and purges us of scorn. There, in that laughable figure, speaks one who is also a man. There, in that absurd character, acts one who is also a woman. There, but for the grace of God, go we".

Yet this is only true of him who "thinks"; what of him who "feels" the difference between life and life's potential? All three, Shakespeare, Molière and Cervantes, must have felt as well as thought. One must be very careful, too, of attributing "purges" to Shakespeare, in the way that the word is generally connected with Molière and Jonson. It is true that in Falstaff, for instance, we recognize and sympathize with (1) a fellow-man, and that he brings us face to face with reality. But he is first and foremost a figure of fun, and is not intended to serve as an awful warning. If this were not true we would accept the rejection of Falstaff with more joy than sorrow.

Perhaps in the final analysis we do laugh at Falstaff because "there, but for the grace of God, go we ". Yet some must laugh at him sometimes

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1. With a sympathy different from that which we feel for Alceste.

with an unexpressed "there, for some reason, we shall never go". Life is right and we are wrong; in looking at Falstaff we could almost believe that it is he who is right and the rest of the world that is wrong (1).

Mr.Cowling prefixed the quotation which gave rise to this thought by the words:

"Comedy is primarily a matter of intellect".

This

may be true, especially if one is "Frenchified" as Lamb put it. But it is not with one's intellect that one approaches Falstaff.

As yet, in this chapter, the emphasis has been on the word comedy. Another closely related noun, which has been hitherto omitted, is that complex word: humour. No one can fully appreciate Shakespeare's comedies without a sense of humour, and, while we allow other nations to be funny, the world now knows that a sense of humour is a jealously guarded English prerogative. This is one thing that France did not inherit from Ancient Greece, who seems with England, in the words of the late Professor Gilbert Murray(2):

"to stand alone against the rest of the world, much as they do in their idealization of 'sportsmanship'. It is characteristic of both that we

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1. This is temporary escapism, not permanent anarchy.
2. "Aristophanes".1933.p.ix.

do not think of laughter as necessarily, or even usually, unkind. Aristotle lays it down that one of the tests of a good joke is that it must not cause pain to the object of it; and we in England habitually laugh at the things we love and respect far more than at those which we hate. In many European countries, on the other hand, if one may judge from the comic papers, laughter is mostly meant to hurt - or at least public laughter: for it certainly is not so in private life".

In literature, Shakespeare laughs at and with the things he likes; Molière laughs at things he dislikes (1). In life, we in England render ourselves incomprehensible by laughing at the Houses of Parliament, policemen, British Railways and all the things we are secretly proud of. We hear with pleasure Mr. Augustine Birrell's reference to the House of Lords:

"who represent nobody but themselves and have the entire confidence of their constituents",
without
for a moment wondering whether it is true, or whether Mr. Birrell thought it was.

With regard to Professor Murray's distinction between public and private life, it is interesting to note that while French wit may be said

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1. Although many will feel that he is sympathetic towards Alceste.

to be public, with, therefore, only one set of standards, English humour is essentially private, and so has as many varieties as there are Englishmen. We know that England is the home of hobbies and of lost causes, and each of these provides a different set of standards and hence of humour.

Just as poetry was seen (1) to balance bigotry, humour offsets the doctrinaire tendencies with which the world is now beset. The doctrinaire cannot be humorous, for he has not the different levels of thought needed before one can seize hold of the ludicrous.

We are amused to note that the word "humour" itself is of French origin. Professor Fraser Mackenzie, in his work on "Les relations de l'Angleterre et de la France d'après le vocabulaire"(2), shows how "humour" appeared in England in 1340, based on the French word "humeur", but as a physiological and botanical term only. During its residence here, the word acquired its comic sense, which it took back to France in 1693, still with the spelling "humeur". In 1725, the English spelling was adopted as a separate word, which appeared in the "Complément au Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française" in 1866.

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1. Chapter 7, pp.154-155.

2. 1939.vol.1.pp.92-93.p.284; vol.2.p.84.

Officially, then, humour is not yet one hundred years old in France, and is still regarded with suspicion. Littré gives as the eighth sense of "humeur" the approximate meaning "humour", which is entered separately as "mot anglais qui signifie gaieté d'imagination, veine comique".

It is not quite as simple as that, however. Murray's New English Dictionary is to be preferred when, with its usual impeccable scholarship, it distinguishes humour from wit as being less purely intellectual and as having "a sympathetic quality in virtue of which it often becomes allied to pathos".

There are two points there. First, it is necessary as a general practice to distinguish between English humour and French wit. It has been said, for instance, that we can discuss humour in dungarees, but need to don evening-dress to discuss wit. Wit tends to be complete in itself, whereas humour leaves something to the imagination. When Voltaire, exiled by the Prince Regent, left Paris, it was during a violent thunderstorm. Voltaire, looking up at the sky, remarked that:

"the Kingdom of Heaven must have sunk into a Regency" (1).

Here was quickness of observation,

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1. Monsieur André Maurois. "Voltaire". 1932. p.29.

finesse wit in other words, which has been the contribution of France to world comedy, just as humour has been ours (1).

To pursue the difference between them for a moment, Voltaire had only a few seconds in which to make his remark. Now English humour, on the contrary, consists of slowness of observation.

"A poor life is this, if, full of care
We have no time to stand and stare",

was how

Walt Whitman expressed it. In moments of quiet contemplation of everyday objects, and with a measure of self-control, one begins to think on two planes, the two planes necessary for humour. Only then does one realize that no matter how much it rains the water in the village pond never rises; in fact one makes a note of the ducks' Plimsoll lines to prove it. Few French authors have shown any signs of watching the village pond or of leaning over a gate (2) with apparently vacant gaze.

Yet this is where Shakespeare's humour and English humour spring from to a large extent. This is what caused even the redoubtable Pichot to say that the humour of Shakespeare, Dickens and Sterne was a great stumbling-block to French

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1. "Esprit" being as difficult to define as "humour".
 2. Some of the more notable exceptions, such as La Fontaine and Daudet, appear in chapter 12.

readers, and that all three together could not equal Molière. Now the stumbling-block is only too apparent, but the second part of the assertion will never be believed by an Englishman. But when Taine thought Dickens's humour grim and savage, it could be assumed that it was life which was grim and savage, and humour which made it bearable.

This is where the second (1) point arising from the New English Dictionary definition may be mentioned: humour made life bearable because it was sympathetic. Now sympathy is not in every case a necessary component of humour, but the two are frequently inseparable. Mr. Charles Chaplin, Fernandel and others have shown this, demonstrating at the same time that a medium of comedy which was once universal is no longer so. It is a remarkable fact that the "progress" of sound-track pictures was a backward movement in that they created a barrier of language previously unknown.

But to return to our English humour, what more do we know about it? We know it is gravity behind the jest; there is something of Lear's Fool in most English people.

Other definitions are not lacking: they are there for the quoting, more abundant than

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1. The first(p.216) was that humour is less purely intellectual than wit.

those of comedy, in fact. One outstanding definition of English humour is that of Montesquieu:

"Ce que les images sont dans la poésie, l'humour est dans la plaisanterie" (1).

Yet that is fragmentary, though good, and again it is hard to find any definition which is near to being conclusive.

A noteworthy English definition of humour, as far as this work is concerned, is that of Thomas Carlyle in his essay on Richter:

"True humour springs not more from the head than from the heart; it is not contempt; its essence is love; it issues not in laughter, but in still smiles, which lie far deeper. It is a sort of inverse sublimity, exalting, as it were, into our affections what is below us, while sublimity draws down into our affections what is above us".

The smile that lies far deeper. There is the real English humour. No Englishman laughs loudly unless he is drunk (2).

The cartoonist Bairnsfather, during the first World War, drew a cartoon of a wall with a gaping hole in it. A young soldier enquired of an

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1. "Pensées et Fragments Inédits de Montesquieu". 1901.vol.2.p.8.
2. Sir Harold Nicolson ("Small Talk".1937.p.52) would add members of the Royal Family and those who are Jewish on their mother's side to the list of exceptions.

older comrade what had caused the hole, and received the laconic reply: "Mice" (1). This is the humour usually associated today with "Punch", which, despite assertions of growing bitterness, still ridicules more the things it loves than those it hates. Even its bitterness may be no more than the sadness with which, according to Froissart and the Duc de Sully, we English take our pleasures.

Much English humour springs from sadness, the humour of Shakespeare's Fools and their descendants, for example. Even so, these have what French literature and many French people have not: a sense of fun.

"If the French have a fault"

wrote Laurence

Sterne in "Sentimental Journey",

"they are too serious".

Similarly, Mr.H.G.Wells, in his "Outlines of History", recorded that Napoleon was reputed never to have laughed. Again in Henri Bergson's "Le Rire" (2) there is a sense of comedy, a sense of humour even, but no sense of fun. Without this sense of fun it must be difficult to read Shakespeare's comedy,

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1. This cartoon was translated for the benefit of German soldiers in the second World War, with the added comment: "The hole was not caused by mice, but by a shell".
2. Reserved for the following chapter.

where so often, in Falstaff, Mercutio, Peter Quince and company, and all the other clowns, the individual escapes from the daily round by taking a humorous revenge on it.

Above we have noted: observation, love, sadness, a sense of humour, a sense of fun and meiosis. We must include also the ability to laugh at one's self. Self-mockers are comparatively rare in French life and literature. The French much prefer to laugh at others, the literary exceptions being outstanding by their rarity (1). You cannot pull a Frenchman's leg: you will only offend if you try. This is not a pedantic point. Without realizing that a man can make fun of himself, one is not likely to make much headway in appreciating Falstaff and others of Shakespeare's comic creations.

Ability to laugh at one's self is closely allied to the English love of topsy-turviness, of turning things upside down (which began with Aristophanes), of making the real ludicrous. There is no equivalent in France of that important legacy of the Victorian era: the "Nonsense" group of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear and W.S. Gilbert (2). The French

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1. See chapter 12.

2. One hears the music of Sullivan in France, but the lyrics of Gilbert are seldom heard there.

have not known these or their like.

Sir Alan Herbert, in his presidential address on "The English Laugh" to the English Association in 1950, thought our capacity for nonsense to be an endearing aspect of our character, and quoted Sir Harold Nicolson as saying of it that:

"it might not be an index of a very active intellect, but it is an index of a most agreeable temperament".

We seek verbal frivolity at every opportunity, whereas in France comedy is reserved for certain times and places. This frivolity is reality, but reality turned upside down, looked at from underneath, the sort of things which raises a smile rather than a laugh.

It is easy to make people laugh; a smile is not so easily evoked. Shakespeare's humour overcomes the difficulty by its "down-to-earth" technique, its homeliness, for Shakespeare mixes realism with his romanticism, a further mixture of genres. It is this earthy humour which ensures the success of the rude mechanicals in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and places the scenes in which they appear among the most amusing episodes in the whole of

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Shakespeare's plays. Thus, Shakespeare is forever letting in a breath of English fresh air, even in his tragedies.

He likes to include a song, also, for there is much music in Shakespeare's plays (1). Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that music and comedy are hardly separable in them. Shakespeare was the first, following the experiments of Lyly and Lodge, to make music an integral part of drama. Music helps the imagination, music is the food of love and love is the basis of Shakespeare's comedy. One comes thereby to accept the land of never-never, the land of "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

In such a frame of mind as that, Shakespeare's comedy is not difficult to accept and enjoy. One forgets that comedy is often cruel, often vulgar, often a trifle strained, and that the end of a comedy is often the beginning of a tragedy. One forgets all that, because none of it appears in Shakespeare's English Athens (2) or in the Forest of Arden. The music and love in Shakespeare's work cause us to fleet the time carelessly.

The English mind is so moulded that we do not hover on the threshold, searching for

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1. Some fifty songs, in fact.
2. "A Midsummer Night's Dream".
3. "As You Like It".

the key when the door lies wide open. We, like Mrs. Shandy, do not "dabble in reasoning". The French, like Mr. Shandy, love to reason upon everything, even upon Shakespeare's comedy. Far be it from us to suggest that Shakespeare's comedy deteriorates under the microscope, but at least it is likely to be better as a whole than in parts.

Yet how should one change human nature?

"You cannot force people to laugh: you cannot give a reason why they should laugh: they must laugh of themselves or not at all" (1).

That is as true now as when Hazlitt wrote it.

Frenchmen before Shakespeare's day would have found him amusing, would have laughed "of themselves", but by the time the plays were written it was too late. Although Renan said that he would like to teach all nations to laugh in French, it would be easier to teach a nation to cry like its neighbour than to teach them to laugh together. For the moment, the French, in approaching Shakespeare's comedy, are like the Scots: they understand and then laugh, while we English are content to be amused as children are amused.

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1. "Lectures on the English Comic Writers". 1819. p. 11.

The chief detail which emerges from the above is that English and French comedy, alike in the early stages and even at the very end of the sixteenth century, are now widely separated. Perhaps we can say that while French comedy flowed into one channel: satire (1), English comedy flowed into several: humour, sympathy, sadness, self-mockery, topsy-turviness, deliberate immaturity, earthiness, and is thus a most complex phenomenon (2). If there is a potential of humour in France, in the North for instance, it has never been fully realized. Until it is, Shakespeare's comedy will probably continue to be a source of wonder to the French.

The position is one of stalemate. One wonders if this world will ever laugh or smile at the same things in the same way at the same moment.

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1. The one thing that Shakespeare's comedy generally is not.
 2. Chapter 12 will show that while no French author combines all these qualities, there are some who have one or more of them. La Fontaine and Alfred de Musset are probably the most "Shakespearean" of those discussed there.

Chapter 11

Shakespeare and Molière

Chapter 6 began (1) with Mr. Lytton Strachey's remark that:

"Englishmen have always loved Molière. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that they have always detested Racine".

Just as Racine required a separate chapter apart from other general remarks on tragedy, so, in completing a discussion based on Mr. Strachey's statement, we require a separate chapter for "Shakespeare and Molière", quite apart from the previous chapter on comedy in general.

This is not to be an attempt at deciding which of the two is the greater comic writer; a better prospect would be to compare both with Plautus as Klingelhöffer has done (2). In that way one is able to view the relationship between "Aulularia" and "L'Avare" on the one hand, and "Menechmae" and "The Comedy of Errors" on the other (3).

It is safer, however, to treat each as an entirely separate genius, and then see in

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1. p.110.

2. W. Klingelhöffer. "Plaute imité par Molière et par Shakespeare". 1875.

3. Regnard wrote a comedy "Menechmes" based on Plautus. See note 1, p.273, and context.

what respects Shakespeare and Molière differ and in what respects they are alike. In whether they are close together or far apart, not in whether one is greater than the other, lie the answers to the questions suggested by the heading "Shakespeare and Molière".

In dealing with "Shakespeare and Racine", we found it convenient to use Boileau's "L'Art Poétique" as a basis for study. A similar basis is formed for this present chapter by the famous essay of Henri Bergson on the signification of comedy: "Le Rire" (1).

On the first point noted by Monsieur Bergson (page 2) we shall all be in agreement: that laughter beggars description. It is no more simple, except perhaps for a Frenchman, to analyze the comedy of Molière than it is to perform a similar analysis of the comedy of Shakespeare.

Most will agree, moreover, that laughter is essentially a living thing (page 3):

"Il n'y a pas de comique en dehors de ce qui est proprement 'humain'".

Not only is laughter rooted in physiology, but also it belongs uniquely to human physiology. The human animal is the only one, or

1. The page references are to the Thirteenth Edition. 1914.

so it is generally assumed, which can distinguish between laughter and tears. Furthermore, it is human beings who are themselves generally the source of the comedy at which they laugh. Bergson would say that animals are only funny when behaving as humans might behave, as when they stand on hind legs or carry a newspaper. Many will feel, however, that the behaviour of Launce's dog in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" was meant by Shakespeare to be comic without any reference to human behaviour (1). Thus far, however, there is no real difference between Molière and Shakespeare. Each has a comedy which beggars description and each deals with human antics.

Despite these similarities, one is nevertheless aware that certain antitheses are to be noted. No later than page 6 we find this challenging assertion:

"Le comique exige donc enfin, pour produire tout son effet, quelque chose comme une anesthésie momentanée du coeur. Il s'adresse à l'intelligence pure".

This is what Sherlock Holmes would have called a "three-pipe" problem. According to Bergson, the heart is to play no part at all in laughter, which is to be exclusive to the head. We have

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1. See note 2, p.271.

actually noted this already: French head and heart working separately. In Molière it continues to do so. Molière makes his reader "rire dans l'âme", not "dans le coeur". He can approach a character with the clinical objectivity which is typical of the French mind and of which we in England are generally incapable. We are not meant to have any sympathy for Alceste (1) and Harpagon, and yet we in this country invariably have. Even those who know of the French attitude cannot help feeling deep down that Alceste was right and that, taken outside the walls of Paris and given "un coeur digne de l'entendre" (2), he would have shown it; and, less justifiably, that Harpagon was more sinned against than sinning.

There lies a radical difference. Neither Shakespeare nor any other English playwright could cause an old man in love with a girl much younger than himself to have his coffers stolen, and yet create a comedy round it. Such a framework has all the makings of an English tragedy. It is remarkable how much has been written in defence of Shakespeare's miser, Shylock, yet the French critics see tragedy there much less frequently than ours do, and tend to echo the

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1. Although, as we noted on p.214, many scholars will feel that Molière himself felt sympathetic towards Alceste.
 2. Stendhal.

title of "comedy" bestowed on the play in the First Folio.

It was Pushkin who compared Harpagon and Shylock as misers, and found that while one was "the Miser" the other remained just Shylock. In other words, Molière did not write "Harpagon", the tragedy of an individual, of an earlier Grandet, but "L'Avare", a comedy aimed at all who might be classed under the general heading. That is why Molière is generally said to be universal and Shakespeare not so. "L'Avare", apart from a few references to seventeenth-century French society, is true of all age and of all time. Shylock, on the other hand, is only valid in his contact with the other characters of "The Merchant of Venice". This is a purely literary distinction, and is no clue whatsoever as to whether Harpagon will outlive Shylock.

Now many will put forward the view that the main characters of Molière are individuals as well as types, and there is much to be said in favour of this. Certain idiosyncracies in the characters of Alceste and Harpagon, for example, tend to bear out the assertion, and make them seem real. Yet although it may be said that when Harpagon blows out one of his two candles, the situation is comic only because it is Harpagon who supplies the blow, in the words of Mr. Punch, another man of the same name would

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do just as well. Whereas one cannot for a moment imagine anyone except the Falstaff succeeding with his tale of the Gadshill robbery. Furthermore, Harpagon causes laughter only in the audience, whereas Falstaff causes "wit in other men" on the stage with him.

However, it is difficult to be at all conclusive on the matter. We as Englishmen cannot laugh at Alceste, Georges Dandin and other sensitive characters (1), whether they be types or individuals or both; on the whole we shall feel less guilty if they are mere types. To the French, with their complete objectivity, it matters not at all whether they be the one or the other, and the subject has long been abandoned in their country. The laughter will come to them just the same, puppets or flesh and blood beings. It will come because they feel no sympathy; their hearts are temporarily under an anaesthetic, and their intellect alone is at work. Bergson said (p.142) that as soon as a character moves the audience, he ceases to be comic. Yet Falstaff moves us and remains comic, because our hearts are not under an anaesthetic and are sympathetic towards him. It is difficult to imagine what Falstaff looks like when approached by intellect alone (2). Those Frenchmen who do appreciate

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1. Not that there would have been any point in Molière's satire had they not been so.
2. It is worth noting that Falstaff's virility may be admired even when the approach is intellectual.

him for the same reasons that we ourselves do, are men of considerable discernment.

On page 7 of "Le Rire" Monsieur Bergson shows how laughter needs an "echo":

"Combien de fois n'a-t-on pas dit que le rire du spectateur, au théâtre, est d'autant plus large que la salle est plus pleine?".

This is true, for while tragedy is an individual affair, no one likes to feel less perceptive than his neighbour in matters of comedy. In the old days theatre-managers were wont to station laughter-promoters at strategic points in the audience, to laugh themselves and thus cause others to follow suit. As far as Shakespeare's comedy in France is concerned, one must always remember that he has often been played in large theatres to small audiences and, except in the Romantic era, without the provision of the claque. One cannot approach Bottom as one can Tartuffe, by sheer intellectual effort, but a larger audience means a greater chance of one or two people seeing the fun, and then one is hopeful that the laughter may spread.

On the same page(p.7)of Bergson's "Le Rire" comes a reference to the difficulty or

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impossibility of translating comic effects, a matter which received some attention in chapter 1 of this work. Bergson writes:

"Combien de fois n'a-t-on pas fait remarquer, d'autre part, que beaucoup d'effets comiques sont intraduisibles d'une langue dans une autre, relatifs par conséquent aux moeurs et aux idées d'une société particulière?".

To quote that is to realize the truth of it. Much of the material of Shakespeare's plays cannot be put successfully into French, much of the form of Molière's cannot be put successfully into English.

That is the greatest difficulty, but it also works in reverse. Shakespeare's comedy, the material of his comedy, is obtuse to the French, and his comedies themselves by virtue of their rambling construction meet with a cool reception. On the other hand, even Molière has a pun or two, a most rare occurrence with him (1). How does one translate Mascarille's remark to Anselme in "L'Etourdi"?:

"Oui, vraiment, ce visage est encor fort mettable
S'il n'est pas des plus beaux, il est des-agréable"

(2); or

this from "Les Femmes Savantes":

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1. See note 2, p.15.

2. Act I.sc.vi.lines 28-29.

Bélise : "Veux-tu toute la vie offenser la grammaire?

Martine: Qui parle d'offenser grand'mère ni grand-père?" (1).

On page 8 of "Le Rire" comes this statement of laughter's aim:

"Pour comprendre le rire, il faut le replacer dans son milieu naturel, qui est la société, il faut surtout en déterminer la fonction utile, qui est une fonction sociale".

This is probably the greatest point at issue between Shakespeare and Molière. In England, laughter has no useful function, unless it be that of individual well-being. It has, shall we say, no external use. Molière's social function is quite obvious, for he himself says, beginning the first of the three "placets" which preface "Tartuffe":

"Le devoir de la comédie étant de corriger les hommes en les divertissant -----".

Bergson

and Meredith agreed with this reformatory zeal, feeling that to conform to society was the great aim in life and that comedy should help to that end (2). But Shakespeare has many great comic themes which are not social in their aim; some will say that they are positively anti-social.

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1. Act II.sc.vi.lines 63-64.

2. In support of this argument Monsieur Jules Romain has said that every great comic theme has a social basis.

Shakespeare's characters arouse admiration rather than contempt. In the words of Professor H.B. Charlton (1):

"They inspire us to be happy with them; they do not merely cajole us into laughing at them. Therein lies the fundamental difference between Classical and Shakespearean comedy. Classical comedy is conservative. It implies a world which has reached stability sufficient for itself. Its members are assumed to be fully aware of the habits and the morals which preserve an already attained state of general well-being. The main interest is the exposure of offenders against common practice and against unquestioned propriety in the established fitness of things. Hence, its manner is satire, and its standpoint is public common-sense. But", concludes Professor Charlton,

"Shakespearian comedy is a more venturesome and a more imaginative undertaking -----it is not finally satiric; it is poetic. It is not conservative; it is creative. The way of it is that of the imagination rather than that of pure reason. It is an artist's vision, not a critic's exposition".

One could not possibly put "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "As You Like It", to name only two, under the heading of "social reform". If the aim of all comedy is to be social, then "Tartuffe",

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1. "Shakespearian Comedy". 1938. pp. 277-278.

"Le Misanthrope", "L'Avare" and "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" are the greatest comedies ever written, and "A Midsummer Night's Dream", as Pepys remarked, must rank as the silliest play of all time.

Professor Louis Cazamian, whom one always quotes with respect, writes of humour(1):

"It unearths excess and punishes the sinners".

It does up to a point. But Shakespeare's characters are rarely punished or corrected. Malvolio seems to be whipped (2), as is Falstaff at the end(3). Yet no one is made to see the error of his ways, as most of Molière's protagonists are, or seem to be. Shakespeare's laughter is the rib-tickling kind, and its aim may be said to be quite simply the tickling of ribs.

Mr.Stephen Leacock, in "Humour and Humanity" (4), thought differently:

"Molière's comic genius, or rather his genius for comedy, has never been surpassed. His light has never burnt dim. Shakespeare, no one doubts, was a great dramatist. His comedies are filled with interest: but will any candid mind find in their lines

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1. "L'Humour de Shakespeare".1945.p.217.

2. See note 2, p.210.

3. Even that was comic, no doubt, to Elizabethan audiences.

4. 1937.p.138.

the laughter that breaks from the open page of Molière, and interpreted by French genius on the stage convulses still alike either court or crowd?".

Here is at least one mind, reasonably candid, that could find such lines.

Certainly there are more problems in "Le Misanthrope" than in Racine's "Bérénice", while Shakespeare's comedy is free from problems. Perhaps the emphasis in Mr. Leacock's assertion lies in the stage interpretations, for no one could deny that the Comédie-Française has had singular successes with Molière's plays in London, Berlin and Moscow, as well as in Paris. When it comes to laughter breaking from the open page, however, Shakespeare must be granted equal rank (1), equal rank, that is, in the full knowledge that each was unique in his particular sphere.

Where Mr. Leacock's assertion is important is to support at this present time the view gradually being held by many of recent years that Molière was not particularly social in his aim (2) and that he was as much of a "rib-tickler" as Shakespeare. We are not thinking only of accusations such as that which Monsieur François Mauriac has made

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1. By reason of lines which could be quoted here, but which will have their place in the following chapters.
2. It would be interesting if one could ascertain exactly how much this new view owes to Shakespearean studies.

against "Tartuffe" (1), but rather of the most recent biographies of Molière. That of Monsieur René Bray, for instance, (1954), sees Molière as an amuser pure and simple, not just a mere "farceur", not a Regnard, but a highly-skilled amuser, with the emphasis nevertheless firmly on "amuser".

There is a strong case to be made in favour of this argument, and one which causes Molière to lose none of his reputation. He himself said:

"Je voudrais savoir si la grande règle de toutes les règles n'est pas de plaire?".

One should not thereupon belittle Molière's masterpieces as mirthful escapades: not all ages are agreed on what is meant in literature by "to please". Moral criticism would please the Court at Versailles. But Molière wrote a number of minor plays in addition to his best known ones. These farces and pastorals were the very plays which Boileau disliked (2):

"Si moins ami du peuple, en ses doctes peintures
Il n'eût point fait souvent grimacer ses figures;
Quitté, pour le bouffon, l'agréable et le fin,
Et sans honte à Térence allié Tabarin.

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1. That ~~is~~ was an anti-social mockery of Orgon, a good Christian man.
 2. "L'Art Poétique". Chant III. lines 395-400.

Dans ce sac ridicule, où Scapin s'enveloppe(1),
Je ne reconnais plus l'auteur du 'Misanthrope'!"

Among those minor plays are several which have the "as you like it" stamp of Shakespearean comedy. One thinks of "Mélécerte", "La Princesse d'Elide" and "Les Amants Magnifiques", plays which were not forerunners of the greater ones, but contemporaneous with them. They are entertainments pure and simple, with no suggestion of moral aim.

As you like it, or what you will: not a newly discovered Shakespeare play, but what Molière seemed to be thinking of in these minor plays. Even "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" is described by him as a "comédie-ballet". It would help Molière's plays to be more popular in England if the new view could prevail here: we are not for problems in our comedy. If the new view were to prevail in France, moreover, it might reveal Shakespeare in a more favourable light. For Molière and Shakespeare are very close at times in their ability to provoke laughter, even "le gros rire". In "Le Médecin Malgré Lui" there is laughter of the kind inspired by "The Merry Wives of Windsor". This type of laughter faces no problems and leaves no reflection of bitterness in the mind of the laughter. All problems and bitterness are forgotten for

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1. In fact it is Scapin who puts Géronte in the sack. However, the general sense is clear: Boileau disapproved of the device.

a moment in the mirth of ultra-farce.

Before leaving the question of the social aim of comedy, we must mention one facet of it that is generally overlooked: does Molière's comedy in fact have the corrective value usually assigned to it? Faguet and others thought it had. Monsieur Bray and others think it has not, and one is bound to agree that misers are not likely to go to the theatre, that the reaction of an *Alceste* to ridicule is to be even more on the defensive, and that the blue-stockings who assembled at Versailles to see "*Les Précieuses Ridicules*" and "*Les Femmes Savantes*" were just as much blue-stockings on the following morning as on the previous one.

Of course, one must not forget the most disturbing point of view put forward by various Lord Mayors of London in letters to the Government between 1594 and 1597, in which they complained that the vices depicted on the stage:

"move wholie to imitation and not to avoydinge of those faults and vices which they represent" (1).

This may not be as strange as it seems at first sight. It would be unjust to credit Molière with all French misers, misanthropists and hypocrites since his day, but the above letters were from

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1. Alfred Harbage. "*Shakespeare's Audience*". New York. 1941. pp.6-7.

responsible citizens, and many will feel a certain amount of sympathy for them in the light of present-day drama and its relation to society.

Molière's reforming spirit, the traditional French critic will say, was that of Sir Philip Sidney (1): the vices must not be made attractive, but should make every beholder that he could not "be content to be such a one". Even so, nearly two hundred years after Sidney, Beaumarchais could write:(2):

"A la honte de la morale, le spectateur se surprend trop souvent à s'intéresser pour le fripon contre l'honnête homme, parce que celui-ci est toujours le moins plaisant des deux".

Alceste or Philinte? There is more than a grain of truth in Beaumarchais' remark. It was a German philosopher who, according to Mr. George Gordon (3), liked Falstaff, Pistol, Stephano and Trinculo for the very reason that they refused to conform to society (4).

The next point to be considered

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1. Quoted on p.203.
 2. "Essai sur le Genre Dramatique Sérieux".
 3. "Shakespearean Comedy and other studies".1944.p.9.
 4. Though, of course, in a manner different from that of Alceste.

now that we have discussed the social aim of comedy, is that of automatism ("Le Rire".p.10), to which is closely allied the repetition of words (p.74). There is a certain amount of common ground here, for the "jack-in-a-box" theory may be supported by reference to both Molière and Shakespeare, particularly to the former. "Sans dot!", "Et Tartuffe?" and "Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?" are all well known, and there are others. In Act II.sc.iv. of "L'Etourdi" Lélie has seven consecutive "speeches", six of which consist of "Ah!" and the other of "Ah!Ah!". As soon as he has left, Mascarille takes up the theme in mocking vein with a further three "Ah!"s. In Shakespeare an equivalent automatism in words lies in Nym's "humours" in the Falstaff plays.

Yet there is a difference of approach here, for while both Molière and Shakespeare may be said to excel in comedy of character, one has to be careful not to confuse two things which, though apparently similar, are in fact different. The confusion arises out of the word "character". In referring to Molière's comedy of character, character means that abstract quality otherwise designated as ego, temperament, personality and so on. In referring to Shakespeare's comedy of character, character means

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a person in the play, one of the "dramatis personae". In other words, when Harpagon cries emphatically: "Sans dot!", one feels that those two words sum up all there is to be said of the miser. On the other hand, when Nym says: "And that's the humour of it", it does not suggest of its own account that the speaker is a swashbuckling "miles gloriosus" (though reference to others of his kind would no doubt show that they all had a similar speech). Be that as it may, automatism is present in the comedy of both Shakespeare and Molière, in present-day comedy, and in life, also.

Such is not the case in dealing with the next point from Bergson's essay (page 14), namely that:

"les coureurs d'idéal qui trébuchent sur les réalités"

are comic. This, of course, is Alceste's tag, but Alceste is comic only if one separates head and heart, and at the same time separates literature from life. Both of these things are possible in France, as has already been noted, for there one can laugh at without feeling pain. That is quite impossible in England, where many feel sorry for Alceste, who thereupon ceases to be comic.

Our own man who slips up on reality is Falstaff, but what a difference in the slipping. No

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two men could be more different from each other than Alceste and Falstaff. Yet it must follow that if we cannot approach Alceste solely with the head, the French cannot approach Falstaff solely with the heart. One cannot refrain from wishing, however, that they will one day admit, at least, that Alceste is not nearly as comic as those of his circle. Meanwhile, our laughter at "Le Misanthrope", in Shelley's words, "with some pain is fraught".

On page 17 of "Le Rire" Bergson has this to say:

"Il suffira ----- de remarquer qu'un personnage comique est généralement comique dans l'exacte mesure où il s'ignore lui-même".

It is evident that both Shakespeare and Molière show that this remark is only partially true. In Molière's high comedy, for instance, Monsieur Jourdain is comic to the French audience for the reason that he does not realize into what a ridiculous situation he is putting himself. If he were to realize that and brood upon it, "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" would no longer be a comedy by any definition.

On the other hand, in much less intellectual vein, Molière does illustrate in the character of Sganarelle (in "Le Médecin Malgré Lui")

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that a character who does not take himself seriously and who therefore knows that he is comic, can show that Monsieur Bergson's remark is only partly true. In the words of Lucas (1), Sganarelle is both doctor (by acquiescence) and fool (by nature). He accepts his new profession and performs his tasks in his own way. Unlike the father and son Diafoirus (2) who are comic without knowing it, Sganarelle knows perfectly well that he is comic. He has to be in order to "diagnose" Lucinde's malady without giving himself away.

In Shakespeare, also, some comedy arises from characters who know they are comic: the Fools, the Clowns and particularly Falstaff, who makes the matter quite clear:

"I am not only witty in myself, but also the cause that wit is in other men" (3).

At the same time, other characters provoke laughter of which they themselves are unaware: the rude mechanicals of "A Midsummer Night's Dream", for instance. While the major part of Molière's comedy derives from characters who are unaware of the laughter which they cause, and the major part of Shakespeare's from characters who are fully aware of it, there is once again a certain

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1. Act I.sc.v.last line.
 2. "Le Malade Imaginaire".
 3. "2Henry IV".Act I.sc.ii.

amount of ground common to both.

Up to this point Monsieur Bergson has been concerned mostly with intellectual comedy. However, he does find room for the physical side of the genre, saying on page 53 that when the physical is added to the moral there is a tendency towards the comic. Thus, when Lear returns from hunting he must on no account be allowed to eat the dinner for which he calls, for nothing could justify that particular form of comedy in tragedy (1). In Molière, the physical comedy arises partly from drubbings and beatings (2) and partly from disguise. This trick of concealed identity is used some nine times by Molière, and it provides him with opportunities for dramatic irony and "double entendre" (3). In "L'Etourdi", "L'Ecole des Femmes" and "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme", it is an integral part of the drama. In Shakespeare, disguise has a part in all the comedies we are to discuss later: "As You Like It", "The Taming of the Shrew", "Measure for Measure", "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "Henry IV" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor". It may, therefore, be regarded as an element common to both playwrights.

By reference to Henri Bergson's essay, then, several points both of difference and of similarity between Molière and Shakespeare have emerged.

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1. See p.164.lines 4f.
2. A device which Molière uses more often than Shakespeare.
3. "Le Rire".p.98.

There are others not specifically referred to in "Le Rire".

To touch on differences first, the difference in form is obvious. Yet it is not only a difference apparent to the eye. It goes deeper than that. Molière, as we know, was much more interested in character than in plot, and Shakespeare's plots do contain weaknesses. Even allowing for these facts, however, it is apparent that while Shakespeare has a story, Molière has not. Professor Dowden's definition of a Shakespeare comedy was (1):

"A delightful story, conducted in some romantic region, by gracious and gallant persons, thwarted or aided by the mirthful god, Circumstance, and arriving at a fortunate issue".

Shakespeare, unlike Molière, does not examine cases in his comedies; he tells stories, as, of course, Molière does in some of his minor plays. Possibly this arises because Shakespeare's young lovers form the centre of the story (2), whereas in Molière they are never more than a sub-plot (3).

Molière's protagonists are always

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1. In: "William Shakespeare as a Comic Dramatist". 1903.
 2. e.g.: Rosalind and Orlando in "As You Like It".
 3. e.g.: Elise and Valère, Mariane and Cléante in "L'Avare".

older than Shakespeare's outstanding comic characters, and furthermore, whereas Racine's tragedy was seen(1) to be of Woman and Shakespeare's of Man, Molière's comedy is of Man and Shakespeare's of Woman. *Alceste*, *Harpagon* and *Monsieur Jourdain* on the one hand are balanced by *Rosalind*, *Beatrice* and *Viola* on the other.

From these half-dozen names a difference of tone is at once apparent. It would be interesting to pursue this point and see how Molière is to comedy what Shakespeare is to tragedy, for each develops a different genre in the same way, and with the same force. Or, again, one might discuss how Molière's comedy would have differed if he had written tragedies also (2).

A further dissimilarity between Molière and Shakespeare lies in the different proportion of action contained in the comedies of each. For one thing Molière generally has fewer characters than Shakespeare, and his attention to the unities restricts further his use of action. Thus, when Shadwell based his *"The Miser"* on Molière's *"L'Avare"*, he said in the preface that the French play had:

"too few persons and too little action for an English theatre".

He added derisively:

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1. See note 2, p.113 and its context.
2. Which he did only on a minor scale, and then in collaboration with others. Cp. *"Psyché"* (1671), written in collaboration with Pierre Corneille and Philippe Quinault. See also pp.316-322.

"nor did I ever know a French comedy made use of by the worst of our poets that was not better'd by 'em".

Shadwell then went on to prove himself wrong by making of Harpagon a mere buffoon.

The earlier part of his assertion, however, was justifiable. Shakespeare is interested in an action rather than an abstract, and fills his comic stage with as many people, happy people, as he can. Molière provides only as many characters, worried characters for the most part, as he needs for his purpose. While these are of all classes (1) from marquis to maidservant, Molière does not have as varied a population as Shakespeare musters: dukes, young lovers, servants, weavers, tinkers, policemen, students, pedagogues, soldiers, justices, hosts and hostesses.

That is important in tracing the reception of Shakespeare's comedy in France, because there the mechanicals, the Clowns and the Fools are not generally admired as much as in this country. Professor J. Dover-Wilson showed (2) how Shakespeare loved his "flotsam and jetsam", and pointed to a difference between his approach and that of Molière:

"The aim of the majority of great comic writers ----- is to make us uncomfortable.

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1. e.g.: "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme".

2. "Shakespeare and Humanity". In: "Les Langues Modernes" 41e.année.no.3.1947.p.A.25.

Shakespeare's comic muse has a different message; that the deepest things in life may be hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed to fools; that, however much the stupid and simple may be overwhelmed in the court of the world's laughter, they are allowed to appeal to a higher court: ----- what wins our affection is not work or wealth or intellect or rectitude, but humanity, naked and unassuming".

Although Molière does show some fellow-feeling in his work (1), and although he wrote for Versailles and Paris, his point of view was, and had to be (2) that the test of any play was the judgment of the Court. This, even though at times Molière must have felt with Eraste (3):

"Et cent fois j'ai maudit cette innocente envie
Qui m'a pris à dîner de voir la comédie,
Où, pensant m'égayer, j'ai misérablement
Trouvé de mes péchés le rude châtement".

If Molière could have developed his "as you like it" writing, "égayer" rather than "châtiment", perhaps Shakespeare's comedy would have come as less of a surprise to French audiences.

Or perhaps, when it comes to noting similarities between Shakespeare and Molière,

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1. For valets and servants particularly (e.g. Dorine in "Tartuffe" and Nicole in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme") to whom he gives distinctive modes of speech.
 2. "Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes".
 3. The first speech of "Les Fâcheux".

the only surprise is that Shakespeare should have been such a long time knocking on the French door. There are many individual traits in Molière's comedies which seem to bring him close to Shakespeare.

There is a similarity of thought, for instance, in Act I.sc.iii of "Les Fourberies de Scapin" and Act II.sc.iv of "Henry IV", where both Scapin and Falstaff set themselves up as irate fathers in order to rehearse with the offending son an impending paternal scolding.

Secondly, Molière often suggests that he can laugh at himself. He may have done so in "Le Malade Imaginaire" and in all his laughing references to conjugal discontent.

Thirdly, Molière occasionally mixes his genres as Shakespeare does. John Dryden had noticed this in 1668, writing that Molière was one of those who:

"of late years ----- have been imitating of afar off the quick turns and graces of the English stage. They have mixed their serious plays with mirth" (1).

In "Don Juan", for example, where the unities

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1. "Essay on Dramatick Poesie". p.38. Dryden presumably meant by this a mixture such as the one quoted, from "Don Juan"(1665), or that of Orgon and Tartuffe appearing in a "serious" play with the comedy of Dorine in contrast ("Tartuffe"; 1664).

are not observed, this mirth is very Shakespearean, deriving as it does from the dialect of Charlotte and Pierrot. Yet in the same play we have the pathos of Doña Elvire's genuine love for a scoundrel, and Don Juan's malediction of his own father (1):

"Hé! Mourez le plus tôt que vous pourrez, c'est le mieux que vous puissiez faire. Il faut que chacun ait son tour, et j'enrage de voir des pères qui vivent autant que leurs fils".

This is not funny,
intellectually or otherwise.

Mention of Doña Elvire reminds us that while Molière's protagonists are men, he often joins Shakespeare in honouring Womanhood. Doña Elvire and Elmire more than make up for the wrongly named Angélique (wife of Georges Dandin) and all the blue-stockings, just as Rosalind is a foil to Lady Macbeth.

"Honouring Womanhood" is the fourth point of similarity between Shakespeare and Molière. A fifth point lies in the endings of their plays. Shakespeare has been accused by French critics of straining our credulity by twisting his endings to unravel a complicated plot. What of the intervention of the king at the end of "Tartuffe", or the rapid exit of Don Juan? How can one accept the nine "faux pas" of "L'Etourdi", plus the unlikely conclusion?

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1. Act IV.sc.vii.

Molière likes a happy denouement as much as Shakespeare does. Certainly he seems more anxious that Harpagon should end the play by going to see his beloved "cassette" again than by making him announce that he is no longer interested in it. In fact, Molière is less cruel to Harpagon than Shakespeare is to Falstaff. Even if he has no Forest of Arden, he joins in following the dictum of Terence:

"Homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto" (1).

Even

Alceste has a possibility of happiness in his "endroit écarté", and only Georges Dandin (2) seems to be really embittered at the end. We may find self-vindictive humour at the point where he wants to jump head-first into the river, but this is nearer to English tragedy than to English comedy.

Molière, however, is not always as serious as he is with Georges Dandin. He has at times a certain "daftness" (3) of which Shakespeare would have approved:

"Non, je ne reviens pas, car je n'ai pas été;
Je ne vais pas aussi, car je suis arrêté;
Et ne demeure point, car tout de ce pas même,
Je prétends m'en aller" (4).

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1. "I am a man:I count nothing human indifferent to me"
2. Who was not a Petruchio, evidently.
3. The word which Professor R.L.G.Ritchie used in connection with the atmosphere of the fairy-tales of Anatole France ("Anatole France".1928.p.22).
4. "Le Dépit Amoureux". Act I.sc.iv.lines 5-8.

Lines like those (from *Mascarille*, but it might have been *Touchstone*) serve to make Molière's minor farces better appreciated in England than his plays of greater reputation.

Mention of *Touchstone* reminds one that his coarseness has been censured by French critics. He is really no more a disciple of Rabelais, though, in his courtship of Audrey, than Sganarelle is in his manner at the bedside of Lucinde.

As a ninth point of similarity, one sometimes comes across an isolated line of Molière whose lack of logic is very English:

La Flèche: "Qu'est-ce que je vous ai fait?"

Harpagon : "Tu m'as fait, que je veux que tu sortes" (1).

That, as well as being illogical and un-French, is also refreshingly quick after the sonorous beat of the alexandrine. When Molière uses prose, he holds the position which Shakespeare holds in the use of English prose. The lines of Beatrice and Benedick towards the end of "*Much Ado About Nothing*" are most impressive:

Benedick: "Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably.

Beatrice: It appears not in this confession: there's not one wise man among twenty that will praise himself" (2).

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1. "*L'Avare*". Act I.sc.iii.

2. Act V.sc.ii.

Comparable in Molière are these lines of Harpagon and his daughter (1):

Elise : "Je ne veux point me marier, mon père,
s'il vous plaît.

Harpagon : Et moi, ma petite fille, ma mie, je veux
que vous vous mariiez, s'il vous plaît.

Elise : Je vous demande pardon, mon père.

Harpagon : Je vous demande pardon, ma fille.

Elise : Je suis très-humble servante au Seigneur
Anselme; mais, avec votre permission, je
ne l'épouserai point.

Harpagon : Je suis votre très-humble valet; mais,
avec votre permission, vous l'épouserez
dès ce soir.

Elise : Dès ce soir?

Harpagon : Dès ce soir.

Elise : Cela ne sera pas, mon père.

Harpagon : Cela sera, ma fille.

Elise : Non.

Harpagon : Si.

Elise : Non, vous dis-je.

Harpagon : Si, vous dis-je".

So they continue, with a temporary victory for Harpagon. The prose of Beatrice and Benedick is poetical, vague and English; that of

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1. Act I.sc.iv.

Elise and Harpagon prosaic, precise and French (1).

When Hazlitt said of "Tartuffe"(2) that the play might be good logic or rhetoric or philosophy, but not comedy, he underlined a difficulty in the French view of Shakespeare. The comic elements within a Shakespeare play can often, as has been shown in this chapter, be linked to something of a similar nature in Molière: comedy of character and situation, farce, disguise, dramatic irony, physical force, artificial endings, "daftness", naturalism, humour, dialect and so on. All these traits are to be found both in Molière and in Shakespeare, and are not, therefore, likely to come as a shock when a reader of one playwright finds them in the other.

It is evident, then, that the undoubted difficulty of French appreciation of Shakespeare's comedy must lie in the way in which those separate parts are joined together. Where Molière and Shakespeare differ most we have seen to be in their general aims. Hazlitt shows (3) how to that point may be linked one of general construction:

"This play ("Tartuffe") is in one point of view invaluable, as a lasting monument to the credulity

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1. William Hazlitt and Matthew Arnold admired this prose although disliking the wearisome measure of "Le Misanthrope" and "Tartuffe".
 2. "Lectures on the English Comic Writers".1819.p.51.
 3. Op.cit.pp.51-52.

of the French to all verbal professions of wisdom or virtue; and its existence can only be accounted for from that astonishing and tyrannical predominance which words exercise over things in the mind of every Frenchman".

As was seen with regard to Racine, the French ear needs to be flattered. French audiences applaud the moralizing of "Tartuffe" more often than they laugh at its comedy.

Shakespeare, however, is not prepared to offer any moralizing in his plays. He may give us a soliloquy from Hamlet or Macbeth, Lear or Othello which will arouse interest and even applause, but his comedy has no special pleaders. He would, for instance, agree with Alceste:

"Il est vrai: ma raison me le dit chaque jour: mais la raison n'est pas ce qui règle l'amour",

but he would have written "Antony and Cleopatra" to prove it. The comedy of Shakespeare has some of the best of English poetry and prose, but we are aware that it needs an English ear to appreciate it (1).

The conclusion is, then, that in theory, Molière and Shakespeare are alike in several respects, but differ in three: general aim, general

1. Thus, the barrier of language is once again apparent.
See Chapter 1.

construction and language. The aim of Molière has been modified in recent years to make him less of a reformer and more of an amuser, more of a Shakespeare, in fact. The two remaining difficulties, therefore, are general construction (which was seen to be an important point at issue between Shakespeare and Racine) and language.

Of the two, that of language is likely to have the longer life. It was that which enabled Monsieur Jean-Louis Barrault to say as recently as 1948 that, although he preferred Shakespeare to Molière in these times out of joint, nevertheless:

"Molière, c'est nous-mêmes" (1).

1. At a lecture in Edinburgh. "A Propos de Shakespeare et du Théâtre". La Parade. 1949. p.20.

Chapter 12

Shakespearean Humour in French Literature.

Despite the usually accurate distinction between French wit and English humour, it was stated in chapter 10 that there were some notable exceptions to the general observation that French writers are not given to humour. It is time now to glance briefly at some of the exceptions (1), briefly because the subject, which has not been dealt with in detail, would furnish material for a separate study. It is important to touch on it, however, in order to show that much of Shakespeare's comedy has a parallel in French literature (a fact which is often obscured by too frequent reference to Molière), and thus to indicate that the remaining French resistance to Shakespeare's comedy cannot be explained on the grounds of the latter's unexpectedness.

As we saw in chapter 10, English and French humour in the Middle-Ages were closely

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1. We are convinced that the authors discussed are those who best reveal traces of Shakespearean humour, but the following names might be added by some to what must necessarily be an arbitrary list: La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Lesage, Montesquieu, Chateaubriand, Stendhal, H.de Balzac, Mérimée, About, Maupassant, Renard, Rostand, Romain and Maurois.

related. Thus, in the French fables, Miracles and "chansons de geste" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, one is not surprised to discover isolated lines which seem truly Shakespearean. In "Le Charroi de Nîmes" (twelfth century), a peasant is excused from paying toll because of his three children, despite the fact that he seems to have prospered in the salt trade (1). When he is asked about the state of affairs in Nîmes his answer characteristically concerns not the political situation, but the price of food. He adds that things are all right there, if they have not already worsened. This worthy peasant would fit without trouble into Shakespeare's hierarchy. Falstaff would have welcomed him, and probably the practical joker of "Les trois aveugles de Compiègne" (thirteenth century) also.

In "As You Like It" a translation of these lines of Adam le Bossu's would not be out of place:

"Esté faisoit bel et seri,
Douc et vert et cler et joli,
Delitavle en cans d'oiseillons;
En haut bos, près de fontenele
Courant seur maillie gravele

----- (2).

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1. Lines 881-882, 906-907:

"Desor son char a un tonel levé,
Si l'ot emplí et tot rasé de sel

'Ge sui trop povres, si nel poi baillier mie;
Il me lesserent por mes enfanz qu'il virent'".

2. "Le Jeu de la Feuillée", lines 63-67.

This is an earlier version of "Sermons in stones and good in everything", a nostalgic memory of Adam's younger days in some Forest of Arden (1).

Turning now to Villon (1431-1489?) we find another link with Shakespearean comedy, but this time a more grim one than that of trees and running brooks. Villon's humour is bitter and sardonic, an effort to remain cheerful amid the adverse conditions of fifteenth-century Paris. This is, in one sense, Dickensian humour: Villon, like Mr. Micawber, seems constantly to be waiting for something - the Renaissance in his case, perhaps - to turn up, and seems equally sure that it will. Villon, as the essay of Robert Louis Stevenson (2) underlined, was not a model citizen, but he managed to laugh at a seamy existence, much as many of Dickens' and some of Shakespeare's characters do. With his laughter, also, there are mingled tears. Falstaff recalls the trim figure of his youth; Villon enquires nostalgically:

"Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?" (3).

If the medieval ballads foreshadow Shakespeare's picturesque humour, and Villon's verse the humour which triumphs over adversity, Rabelais (1494?-1553) is related to Shakespeare because of his

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1. Cp. "As You Like It". Act II. sc. 1.
 2. Written for the ninth edition of "Encyclopaedia Britannica" and initialled by the author.
 3. "Le Grand Testament": "Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis".

frank, unashamed mirth. Described by Sainte-Beuve as:

"notre Shakespeare dans la littérature comique"

Rabelais has caused not a little embarrassment to French critics at various times, for he wrote in an era when the "esprit gaulois" was still in its prime. Rabelais is like Shakespeare in several ways (1), notably in his love of language for its own sake, his love of ironical overstatement and of bawdy jests. Perhaps the greatest link between them exists through the characters of Falstaff (alternately coward and man of action) on the one hand, and Panurge (the coward) and Frère Jan (the man of action) on the other. Without going too deeply into the question, and without quoting all the bawdy episodes, one is aware that there is often a touch of humour in Rabelais which might be termed deliberately naive and un-French. His prologue to Book 4 begins:

"Gens de bien, Dieu vous saulve et guard!
Où estes-vous? Je ne vous peuz voir. Attendez que je chausse mes lunettes!".

Now such gentle irony is often to be met with in Shakespeare, who would have approved of Rabelais' message in the same prologue:

"Soubhaitez donc mediocrité: elle vous adviendra; et encores mieulx, deuement ce pendent labourans et travaillans".

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1. See: "Shakespeare and Rabelais". In: H. Brown.
"Rabelais in English Literature" 1933. (Cambridge.
Mass.).

He would have liked, also, the characterization of the storm scene in Book 4: Pantagruel praying for safe guidance, the pilot steering his ship, Frère Jan, Epistemon, Ponocrates and the others obeying his orders, and Panurge sitting on the deck crying and groaning. The different character and the different language of each are in the best tradition of Shakespearean comedy.

The fourth name on the list is that of Montaigne (1533-1592) who is often associated (1) with Shakespeare. As far as humour is concerned, one might read through the whole of the "Essays" apparently without meeting a single instance of it. However, Montaigne's whole outlook is humorous by one definition: he is concerned only with himself, and this includes an ability to laugh at himself. He is seriously concerned with knowing himself, but does not take himself too seriously. He is the outstanding example of the man who thinks and finds life comic. In keeping with Walpole's aphorism, Montaigne seems incapable of a tragic thought on anything, and it is there that he parts company with Shakespeare. Yet, on the grounds of the humour of man's wretchedness, or the universal void, there is a close union between them, just as there is through the common-sense which both

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1. From this point onwards it will be important to emphasize that the relationships noted between the authors discussed and Shakespeare, do not suggest, except in the case of Alfred de Musset, that there was any direct influence by Shakespeare on them.

display. Monsieur André Gide, in his essay on Montaigne (1) said that it was a thousand pities that Montaigne should have died (1592) without having been able to read "Don Quixote" (1605):

"The book was written for him",

says Gide. So

was much of Shakespeare's comedy, the comic elements of the tragedies in particular: not the uproarious mirth of Rabelais, but the ironic humour of man set against his universe, seen objectively by Montaigne (though focussed on himself), and subjectively by Shakespeare (though focussed on others), but seen by both of them, nevertheless.

To include Corneille (1606-1684) in this chapter may seem strange, but there is a need for the inclusion. The similarity here between him and Shakespeare is not as strong as it was with regard to tragedy (2), but there is every indication that it might have been. The early comedies of Corneille are very much in the vein of Shakespeare:

"Mélite"(1629), "La Veuve"(1634),

"La Galerie du Palais"(1634), "La Suivante"(1634),

"La Place Royale"(1635), "L'Illusion Comique"(1636)

and even "Le Menteur"(1642).

All follow a similar pattern,

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1. 1929. p.91.

2. See chapter 5.

being intrigues woven around "amoureux de", "aussi amoureux de", "maîtresse", "suivante" and "domestique".

In "La Suivante" Corneille actually states that the scene is set in Paris, but one is disappointed to find that the statement is irrelevant (1).

In "Le Menteur" there are two sets of lines which, together with Voltaire's comments on each of them, show that the French echoes of Shakespearean comedy were not welcomed. In the first speech of the play, Cliton, a valet, has this to say:

"C'est un secret d'amour et bien grand et bien rare;
Mais il faut de l'adresse à le bien débiter,
Autrement on s'y perd au lieu d'en profiter.
Tel donne à pleines mains qui n'oblige personne:
La façon de donner vaut mieux que ce qu'on donne.
L'un perd exprès au jeu son présent déguisé;
L'autre oublie un bijou qu'on aurait refusé.
Un lourdaud libéral auprès d'une maîtresse
Semble donner l'aumône alors qu'il fait largesse;
Et d'un tel contre-temps il fait tout ce qu'il fait,
Que, quand il tâche à plaire, il offense en effet".

Voltaire's comment on that was:

"Molière n'a point de tirade plus parfaite;
Térence n'a rien écrit de plus pur que ce morceau: il
n'est point au-dessus d'un valet, et cependant c'est

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1. In that there is no awareness of place at all.
Shakespeare's Athens is irrelevant, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream", in that the scene is so obviously English.

une des meilleures leçons pour se bien conduire dans le monde. Il me semble que Corneille a donné des modèles de tous les genres".

More to Shakespeare's taste and ours, in "Le Menteur", would be this dialogue between Cliton and Dorante (1):

Cliton : "Vous savez donc l'hébreu?

Dorante : L'hébreu! Parfaitement:

J'ai dix langues, Cliton, à mon commandement.

Cliton : Vous auriez bien besoin de dix des mieux nourries

Pour fournir tour à tour à tant de menteries;

Vous les hachez menu comme chair à pâtés.

Vous avez tout le corps bien plein de vérités,

Il n'en sort jamais une".

Voltaire's comment

on that was:

"Ces vers ne paraissent-ils pas d'un genre de plaisanterie trivial, et même trop bas pour le ton général de la pièce?".

"Trivial" and "bas" they may have been to Voltaire's ears, but one can imagine them in Shakespeare, possibly like this:

Cliton/Hal : "Thou hast thy Hebrew, then?

Dorante/Falstaff: My Hebrew? Perfect, man. Ten

languages I have at my command.

Cliton/Hal : An thou wouldst keep supplied in turn

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1. Act IV.sc.iii.lines 32-38.

so many lies, thou'd need thee ten
of those most apt. Thou churnsts them
out like mincèd meat; and though thy
being's full of truths, not even one
appeareth yet".

One can easily imagine Prince Hal
and Falstaff in an argument of that nature, so much is
it Shakespearean humour. To Voltaire, however, the
moralizing of the earlier speech was more acceptable
comedy. Molière seems to have bridged the two opposing
viewpoints there, for, in declaring to Boileau that he
had learned much from "Le Menteur", he said that the
scene where Dorante (1) is obliged to fight as a
result of his lying, shows that all comedy must have
a moral aim. On the other hand, when Dorante himself
forgets the name of his supposed father-in-law (2),
Molière thought this wholesome fun. The second
observation is Shakespearean, but not the first.

Next, we come to La Fontaine(1621-1695), and here the affinity with Shakespeare is very
strong indeed, even to the fact that both are said to
have been indifferent husbands and fathers. In fact,
it would be a good thing to associate Shakespeare more
often with La Fontaine than with Racine or Molière, for

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1. Not quite so adept or poetic as Falstaff in his
lying, but more sweetly rewarded.
 2. At the end of Act IV.sc.iv. Dorante, speaking to
his own father, refers to his supposed father-in-law
first as Armédon and then, a few lines later, as
Pyrandre.

he spans more easily than they do the gap between French and English poetry.

La Fontaine is a striking example in French literature of the triumph of imagination over reason. Nevertheless, he has always been admired in France by supporters of Classicism, with the exception of Voltaire.

Lord Macaulay dubbed La Fontaine "an idler"; he was. He was humble, also. He was, moreover, an observer and a countryman. He is one of the relatively few great French writers to lean over a gate (1) and tell us what he sees rather than what he thinks. He was not a satirist, for nowhere does he suggest that men shall change their habits (2). On the contrary, La Fontaine is much more concerned with what is than with what ought to be. He does not concern himself with intellect (which varies with the individual), so much as with instinct (which is the same in all of us). The frog which bursts in trying to become an ox knew no better, but Monsieur Jourdain, who tries to perform the same feat, should have recognized his own foolishness. Nor does La Fontaine mind if we laugh at his own foibles and shortcomings, for he can laugh at himself with ease.

Now what has been said about

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1. See note 2, p. 217 and its context.
2. Changing of habits is against nature, though traditional supporters of Molière will never admit it.

La Fontaine is equally true of Shakespeare. Mr. John Bailey, writing on Falstaff (1), emphasized particularly La Fontaine's ability to laugh at himself:

"So when we hear La Fontaine laughing at his own follies and confessing his own sins, we not only forgive him, we love him. Perhaps he is the only French poet for whom we have exactly that indulgent affection, because no other has anything like so much of what we think the supreme element of humour, that which induces a man to laugh freely at himself; a quality which has been much more English than French, as wit, which is akin to satire and mostly exercised at the expense of other people, has been more brilliant in France than in England".

It is remarkable how many judgments on La Fontaine are equally true when applied to Shakespeare. This of Sainte-Beuve is a particularly good example:

"Parler de La Fontaine n'est jamais un ennui, même quand on serait bien sûr de n'y rien apporter de nouveau: c'est parler de l'expérience même, du résultat moral de la vie, du bon sens pratique, fin et profond, universel et divers, égayé de raillerie, animé de charme et d'imagination, corrigé encore et embelli par les meilleurs sentiments, consolé surtout par l'amitié; c'est parler enfin de toutes ces choses qu'on ne sent

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1. "A Book of Homage to Shakespeare".ed.Gollancz.
1916.p.150.

jamais mieux que lorsqu'on a mûri soi-même" (1).

The above could be said as well of Shakespeare as of La Fontaine. If there is one word more important than the rest, it is "l'amitié". La Fontaine has that same sympathy for his characters which rarely deserts Shakespeare in his comedy. One likes to think of Shakespeare and La Fontaine discussing, perhaps with Justice Shallow, the latest fat-stock prices at Stamford Fair (2), or the exploits of their youth (3).

If it seemed at all strange to find the name of Corneille mentioned in this chapter, how much more strange it will seem to encounter that of Racine (1639-1699). Yet Racine did write a comedy, "Les Plaideurs", in 1668. It was based on Aristophanes, which gave it some respectability, but rated so low that the author was forced in his preface to castigate those who, though they laughed at the play, were afraid of having laughed outside the rules.

The play is set in France (4), in

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1. "Fables de La Fontaine". Précédées d'une notice par C.A.Sainte-Beuve. Furne et Cie. Paris. 1855.

2. "2Henry IV". Act III.sc.ii:
 "Death, as the psalmist saith, is certain to all;
 all shall die. How a good yoke of bullocks at
 Stamford Fair?"; and later in the same scene:
 "We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master
 Shallow".

3. The name of Molière(1622-1673) comes next on the list, but his Shakespearean humour was discussed in the previous chapter.

4. The only play of Racine's to be so set.

a small town in Basse-Normandie, and the characters might be real. Once the stage is set, a judge leaps from a window (Act I.sc.iii) and indulges in witty repartee:

Léandre: "Mais où dormirez-vous, mon père?

Dandin : A l'audience"(1).

There

is bribery, unsuccessful(Act I.sc.vi), further repartee(Act I.sc.vii,sc.viii). disguise(Act II.sc.iii, sc.v), the comedy of formal legal language and of physical violence (Act II.sc.iv), dramatic irony (Act II.sc.vi), the farce of the "souponrail" (Act II.sc.xi) and the comedy of the "court" scene in Act III. Of the puppies who are introduced by defence counsel, it is said:

"Ils ont pissé partout".

Thus, when Launce and his dog (2) cause such a stir in France, we have a ready reply for any accusation of vulgarity. On Shakespeare's behalf we must require the French to explain why Shakespeare is vulgar and Racine not so.

We know that Shakespeare and Molière were alike in many respects, and their names

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1. Act I.sc.iv.line 9.

2. "The Two Gentlemen of Verona".Act IV.sc.iv. e.g.:
 "When didst thou see me heave up my leg, and make water against a gentlewoman's farthingale?".
 See note and context of note, p.228.

are often brought together in chapters on comedy. But here in "Les Plaideurs" is something more Shakespearean than any single episode in Molière, and we ought to accept the similarity (1).

With reference to Regnard (1665-1709), the same seems to apply. Stendhal, as we have seen, suggested in his notes on laughter that Molière was greater than Regnard, but that Regnard was the more comic of the two. This is an interesting point of view, for it will be remembered that Stendhal (2) liked to laugh heartily when he went to the theatre. He would not be disappointed in Regnard, if the stage-direction at the end of "Critique de l'homme à bonne fortune" is any indication:

"Le marquis lui jette une poignée de salade au nez. Bonaventure renverse la table. Le marquis tombe le nez dans un plat de crème".

That is more Shakespearean than Shakespeare is! It does forge a stronger point of comparison (3), however, than to

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1. It is a matter for regret to those interested in the appreciation of Shakespeare in France that the constant success enjoyed by "Les Plaideurs" at the "Comédie-Française" has not led to an equal success for Shakespeare's farce. Conversely, it might be argued that we in this country do not view Racine's tragedies with much enthusiasm, despite the success of Shakespeare's tragedies at the Stratford Memorial Theatre.

2. See pp. 208-209.

3. With Petruchio's "table-manners", for instance.

say that Regnard wrote a play called "Ménéchmes" which is based on the same source (1) as Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors". If Regnard could be more appreciated in France, Shakespeare's progress there ought to be easier.

The link between Shakespeare and Marivaux(1688-1763) is, like that between Shakespeare and La Fontaine, a strong one. Gautier was the first to point it out, but both Sarcey and Brunetière denied the link's existence. In Gautier's favour it is noteworthy that it needed about the same length of time - some two hundred years - for the plays of both dramatists to establish themselves on the French stage. Moreover, Marivaux's lovers, like Shakespeare's, are young lovers. Again like Shakespeare he mixes the real with the fantastic. Whether Marivaux ever read any of Shakespeare's plays or not, we do not know (2), but his love which ends in marriage and affection is the love of "As You Like It" and of "A Midsummer Night's Dream", not that of Racine, which ends in disaster and death, or even of Molière, where it takes second place. Moreover, Marivaux's Arlequin is a cousin of Shakespeare's Fools, while "La Double Inconstance" is reminiscent of

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1. The "Menechmae" of Plautus. See note 3, p.226.
2. Marivaux died in 1762 or 1763: the partial translation of Shakespeare by Laplace appeared between 1745 and 1748, the first complete one in French (by Letourneur) not until 1776 onwards. Marivaux edited the French "Spectateur" and may thus have read Addison on Shakespeare.

"Twelfth Night" in its romantic setting.

Naturally, there are differences between Marivaux and Shakespeare: Marivaux observes the unities and Shakespeare does not, Shakespeare has external action and Marivaux has not. Yet it is impossible to read "Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard", for instance, without feeling nearer to Shakespeare's comedy than one does in reading Molière.

Voltaire(1694-1778) is generally considered more witty than humorous, and few would deny that assertion. Yet there are not many, if any, literary strata from which Voltaire can be entirely excluded, and humour is no exception. Particularly akin to Shakespeare is the humour of "Candide", which Monsieur André ^{Maurais} ~~Sade~~, in his biography of Voltaire, called the most "English" of French classical texts. We know that Voltaire admired Swift, and in its inversion of the dictum of Leibniz (1), Voltaire's "Candide" is reminiscent of Swift (2), and very close to Shakespeare. "As You Like It", Falstaff, and Shakespeare's Fools and Clowns generally, have something of that same topsi-turviness, if on a less intellectual scale.

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1. That everything is for the best in this, the best of all possible worlds.
 2. The precise origin of "Candide" is, of course, Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Man". cp. line 289: "One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right".

Another Frenchman to combine English humour with his wit was Beaumarchais(1732-1799), who is not always accorded a place in the front rank of French comedians, but who was included (as shown on page 110) with Molière and Corneille, and no others, in Victor Hugo's definition of the French equivalent of Shakespeare.

Again, the resemblance is worth noting. It was Beaumarchais who, like Voltaire, had visited London, and who wondered whether it was not wrong in comedy:

"vouloir convaincre par le raisonnement dans un genre où il ne faut que persuader par le sentiment" (1).

While Beaumarchais does not abandon reason, he often charms rather than harangues. Figaro is obviously the ringleader here, and whether he is summing up Bartholo's character with abandon (2) in the almost untranslatable words:

"C'est un beau, gros, court, jeune vieillard, gris pommelé, rusé, rasé, blasé, qui guette et furette et gronde et geint tout à la fois",

or whether he is summing up the world with regret (3):

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1. "Essai sur le Genre Dramatique Sérieux".
2. In Act I.sc.iv.of "Le Barbier de Séville".
3. Ibid.Act III.sc.v.

"Et vive la joie. Qui sait si le monde durera encore trois semaines?",

he reminds us now of Falstaff, now of Lear's Fool. Both Beaumarchais and Shakespeare could laugh either for simple fun, or to prevent themselves from crying.

With Alfred de Musset(1810-1857), again one feels a marked resemblance to Shakespeare's comedy. In fact, for the only time in this chapter one may speak of Shakespeare's influence on a French playwright (1). Musset understood Shakespeare better than most other French writers have done (2), and his comedies often follow similar lines, interweaving love-story and comic under-plot.

The opening scenes of "Lorenzaccio" are reminiscent of Shakespeare (3), and there is no great difference between the Florentine society depicted there and the society which Shakespeare depicts in the Falstaff plays. In "Fantasio" (4) there is the fantasy and vagueness which is Shakespearean and essentially un-French, and the quartet of the Baron, Maître Blazius, Maître Bridaine and Dame Pluche

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1. See: F.Lafoscade."Alfred de Musset". 1904.

2. In a letter to Paul Foucher (23rd.September 1827), Musset wrote: "Je donnerais vingt-cinq francs pour avoir une pièce de Shakespeare ici en anglais".

3. G.Lanson refers to "Lorenzaccio" as: "ce drame shakespearien".("Manuel Illustré d'Histoire de la Littérature Française".1931.p.596).

4. See footnote, p.281.

in "On ne badine pas avec l'amour" are very closely related to the Shallow and Silence of Shakespeare's "Henry IV". Love is the keynote of Musset, as it is of Shakespeare. Both are able to fleet the time carelessly, carrying out with impunity the adage:

"No enemy of love like work".

Both have a variety of traits, from elegance and whimsy to violence and bitterness, which separates them from other playwrights, both English and French.

In arriving at the name of Alphonse Daudet(1840-1897) we feel that here is one who may join La Fontaine, Marivaux and Musset as exponents of Shakespearean humour. Much of Daudet's humour derives from his love of nature, his acute observation of it, and his humility in so observing it. In these respects he closely resembles Shakespeare, who, if he did not live in a windmill, had ample opportunity to observe nature from other vantage points. In the "Lettres de mon moulin", Daudet reveals constant touches of humour (1), such as:

"J'avais pris la diligence de Beaucaire, une bonne vieille patache qui n'a pas grand chemin à faire avant d'être rendue chez elle, mais qui flâne

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1. In her book "Alphonse Daudet, sa vie et son oeuvre" (1940), Yvonne Martinet suggests(pp.305-312) that the "Lettres de mon moulin" were written in collaboration with P.Arène. She quotes correspondence between Arène and Daudet in support of her argument.

tout le long de la route, pour avoir l'air, le soir, d'arriver de très loin".

That is real humour, by its whimsicality, its nostalgia, its observation, its leaving something to the imagination and by its sympathy especially, for its author would not have it otherwise.

Occasionally, also, Daudet draws inspiration from the sea, which is relatively a secondary subject in French literature. This reminds us that a stretch of water, though not the sea, is responsible for this humorous extract from "Tartarin de Tarascon", explaining why Tartarin had never left Tarascon:

"C'est au plus s'il connaissait Beaucaire, et cependant Beaucaire n'est pas bien loin de Tarascon, puisqu'il n'y a que le pont à traverser. Malheureusement ce diable de pont a été si souvent emporté par les coups de vent, il est si long, si frêle, et le Rhône a tant de largeur à cet endroit que, ma foi! vous comprenez ----- Tartarin de Tarascon préférait la terre ferme".

Then, after telling of other things, this chapter of "Tartarin de Tarascon" ends inconsequentially:

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"Et voilà comme il se trouvait que Tartarin de Tarascon n'eût jamais quitté Tarascon".

It is possibly wrong to quote extracts from "Tartarin de Tarascon", for the whole of it is humorous, and humorous in the manner of Dickens and of Shakespeare,

Finally, we come to Anatole France (1844-1924), one of the few eminent French writers to have written fairy-stories (1). Admittedly they are adult fairy-stories by English standards, but in a country where whimsicality is rare, occasional flights of fancy are welcome. In "La Grappe de Raisin" is this humorous touch:

"Je dessinais des soldats, je faisais une tête ovale et je mettais un shako au-dessus. Ce n'est qu'après de nombreuses observations que je fis entrer la tête dans le shako jusqu'au sourcils".

Deliberately naive fantasy coupled to acute observation often seems to be a starting-point for humour (2). We may recall, for instance, the rude mechanicals in "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

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1. Although, curiously enough, most of our pantomime stories originated in France.
 2. F. Paulhan, in "La morale de l'ironie" (1909), makes an analysis of irony which is applicable to the urbanity of Anatole France.

In this chapter, certain names among those discussed seem to have come to the fore: La Fontaine, Regnard, Marivaux, Beaumarchais, Musset, Daudet and Anatole France. If French attention could be directed for a time towards those names, the appreciation of Shakespearean comedy in France would benefit, chiefly by the shading of Shakespearean drama into French prose (1), and of Classical comedy into Romantic comedy.

More important still, we would be meeting French objections to Shakespeare's humour by reference to their own authors, not to Dickens, Thackeray and Sheridan. As has been noted throughout, the French have very pronounced views on dramatic art, in comedy as in tragedy, and very few will be convinced that Shakespeare is as great a comic dramatist as Molière. If, however, we can put Shakespeare with those mentioned in this chapter, we shall see that the content, if not the form, of his humour may be analyzed and seen to contain various elements, each of which may be found separately in a French author (2).

If one insists that Shakespeare should be compared solely with other dramatists, Regnard and Beaumarchais, Marivaux and Musset will prove better for the purpose in many ways than Molière. The pure

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1. Thus showing that different vehicles of thought may nevertheless convey similar ideas and inspire similar feelings.
2. Not necessarily a dramatist.

farce of Regnard, the verve of Figaro, the young loves and the fantasy of Marivaux and Musset are closely related to similar traits in Bottom, Touchstone, Rosalind, Falstaff and Petruchio (1).

Shakespeare has many comic traits, and it would be more accurate to say that his comedy resembles a part of Rabelais, of Regnard, of La Fontaine, of Beaumarchais, of Marivaux and of Musset, rather than to say that it resembles the comedy of Molière.

In conclusion, we might even say that though the Greek Gods and the Académie Française laugh like Molière, the Ancient Greeks and the French people laugh like, if not at, Shakespeare.

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1. We recall, for example, these lines from Musset's "Fantasio", which are reminiscent of Touchstone and Shakespeare's Clowns in general. In his last speech, Fantasio replies thus to Elsbeth's request that he should be her "bouffon":

"J'aime ce métier plus que tout autre; mais je ne puis faire aucun métier. Si vous trouvez que cela vaille vingt mille écus de vous avoir débarrassée du Prince de Mantoue, donnez-les-moi, et ne payez pas mes dettes. Un gentilhomme sans dettes ne saurait où se présenter. Il ne m'est jamais venu à l'esprit de me trouver sans dettes".

Chapter 13

Sir John in France

It was seen in chapter 8 that, with regard to tragedy, the interweaving of comedy had been one of the most difficult aspects of Shakespeare for the French to accept. In this equivalent chapter, with reference to comedy, it will be discovered that the admixture of tragedy with it, in the character of Falstaff, has been an equally difficult aspect.

The different attitude which England and France adopt towards Falstaff is made clear when Professor Louis Cazamian states (1) that it takes courage not to run away from Falstaff. Professor Cazamian has that particular courage, but many of his compatriots have not.

In England there is usually no question of that courage being possessed or lacked. Falstaff is accepted here rather than judged, and all of us can laugh with and at him. Falstaff is the comic equivalent of Hamlet; that is to say that even those who are not familiar with the works of Shakespeare have nevertheless heard of both.

1. "The Humour of Falstaff". 1938. p.111.

But while we in England do not enquire too deeply into his character and motives, Sir John is not accepted without question in France. Though it would be unfair to suggest that Henri Bergson's "Le Rire" is responsible for that state of affairs, it is true to say that the atmosphere which inspired and permitted the book is responsible for it.

As was seen on page 244 of this work, Bergson thought that the most comic characters were those who were most unaware of the comedy which they create, Harpagon, Alceste, Orgon and Monsieur Jourdain being famous instances of such characters. Hegel, on the other hand, thought that the most successful comic characters were those who did not take themselves seriously, and Falstaff is one of those supremely aware of the fact that he is comic:

"I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men" (1).

Falstaff, it will be noticed, took it for granted that he was witty in himself, and added as an unusual feature that he also caused wit in other men. The majority of French comic characters, and some English ones also, are concerned merely with the provoking of mirth in other men: "faire rire les honnêtes gens". But Falstaff makes himself laugh, whereas it is difficult to imagine any of Molière's

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1. "2Henry IV".Act I.sc.ii.

protagonists having a hearty laugh. Only Sganarelle (in "Le Médecin Malgré Lui"), as was noted earlier, does not take himself seriously, and then not entirely voluntarily. Falstaff is nearer to Figaro in this respect. Both will make a joke of anything, the difference being that Falstaff is a poet as well as a liar. Neither Sganarelle nor Figaro, however, can laugh at himself as Falstaff does.

Since Falstaff's lies, the chief component of this three-dimensional comedy, are no more comprehensible to French critics than is the whole, it will be useful to trace the humour of Falstaff throughout both parts of "Henry IV".

Falstaff's first appearance is in Act I.sc.ii. of part 1, and we are soon aware that he will have wit at any price:

"Yea, and so us'd it that were it not here
apparent that thou art heir apparent" (53-54)

is
typical of the verbal battle between Falstaff and Prince Hal. Immediately the problem of translation is seen to be a part of French difficulty in understanding Shakespeare's comedy.

Yet neither that nor the coarseness of some of the jests seems to be at the root of the trouble (1). Nor does it seem advantageous

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1. Although Voltaire did wonder how Bishop Warburton had managed to comment on this scene without blushing.

to introduce at this early stage the idea that Falstaff displays a humour which is too deep to sound. In fact, there is a good case for suggesting that Prince Henry is the more humorous of the two in this particular scene. The real humour of Falstaff comes later; the comedy in these early stages is free, direct and spontaneous. It is earthy rather than thoughtful, forming what might be called a "warming-up process".

The real difficulty lies in the absolute contrasts which "Henry IV" immediately displays. In scene one, the talk has been of bloodshed and insurrection, indicative of a chronicle history. The second scene, beginning as it does with Falstaff's addressing his Prince thus:

"Now Hal, what time of day is it, lad?"

might

well be thought by the enquiring mind to be part of an entirely different play. History and comedy, that is one contrast.

Secondly, the blank verse of scene one has given way to prose. Prince Henry, however, maintains a link with the poetry of the historical narrative, and his final speech in Act I. sc.ii. must be hard to reconcile with the prose of Falstaff, the excellent, racy English prose, unrivalled in its particular sphere. If the closing soliloquy of

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the Prince is taken psychologically, it is weak and meaningless (1). English audiences accept it easily in the amiable frame of mind which Falstaff inspires. We do not mind whether we are meant to follow the fortunes of Falstaff, of Henry IV or of the Prince of Wales. We do not mind that comedy and history should go hand in hand. Nor are we troubled that a play should be written half in blank-verse and half in prose. The French critics, however, are troubled by this, troubled that they cannot understand, and troubled that "Henry IV" should be put forward as a great play.

To complicate matters further, Act II.sc.i. introduces a second strain of comedy which does not involve Falstaff, and which, though the stable-companions are comic in themselves, serves chiefly to bring us back from the Percy plot towards the events of Gadshill.

It is in the second scene of Act II that Falstaff reappears, and now begins to show a touch of humour, for he is capable of laughing at

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1. The soliloquy consists of a long simile, in which Prince Henry speaks of his approaching reform:

"Yet herein will I imitate the sun:
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world, --
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wondered at,
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him".

himself, asking for levers to raise him from the ground (line 32), and admitting that he is not a John of Gaunt in prowess (line 63). There is only a trace of humour to begin with, but this develops later into one of the most important aspects of Falstaff's character.

If we were not previously sure that Falstaff is bigger and better than all the rest of his kind, Act II.sc.iv. serves to point it out to us. The farce involving the calling of Frances in the early part of the scene turns into a much more subtle analysis later on. If it did not, we would not be on Falstaff's side when he is fending off the Prince and Poins. He does not expect to be believed, and that is where French critics tend to go astray, because Figaro does expect to be believed. If Falstaff's narrative of his encounter with the men in buckram is approached on the grounds of probability and credibility, it fails on both counts. But if it is approached as a "defiant twist to rational truth" (1), it is magnificent.

Falstaff is determined to cultivate his garden to some purpose, and to achieve freedom and laughter in the process. While French literature strives to discover the solution to the

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1. Professor L.Cazamian's "The Humour of Falstaff".
1938.p.117.

riddle of life, Falstaff has long given it up as a hopeless task. He will take things as they come. Like Omar Khayyám, he will make a jest of that which makes a jest of him.

Thus will he find humour, and through humour, freedom. With reference to this, Professor A.C. Bradley, in his Oxford lecture on poetry entitled "The Rejection of Falstaff" (1), said that:

"the bliss of freedom gained in humour is the essence of Falstaff -----he is the enemy of everything that would interfere with his ease, and therefore of anything serious ----- For these things impose limits and obligations, and make us the subjects of old father antic the law ----- They are to him absurd; and to reduce a thing ad absurdum is to reduce it to nothing and to walk about free and rejoicing" (2).

How true that is: nothingness, breeding not "Hamletism" (3), but good humour and good temper.

The French will object at this point that the world which Falstaff conquers is not

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1. Delivered 5th. March 1902.

2. Few critics have written with greater understanding than Professor Bradley on the characters of Shakespeare's plays. Some will say that he neglected other aspects of the plays, but this does not in any way detract from the value of his assessments of Shakespeare's characters.

3. See chapter 9, pp.179-187.

worth the having. He has acquired his world only to discover that the means by which he has done so render it worthless. Suppose we followed his example, although we are never at any time asked either to follow Falstaff or to take a moral lesson from him and go in exactly the opposite direction. It is not intended that we should learn from Falstaff; we should enjoy his humour.

There are 519 lines in Act II.sc.iv, a brilliant scene brought on its way with Falstaff's humorous description of himself (1), and ended when he falls asleep behind the arras. The two scenes which follow are, together, some 76 lines shorter than Act II.sc.iv, and yet they serve both to carry on the history of the gathering rebellion and to give an account of the Prince's interview with the King, his father. To the astonishment of the French, and the relief of the English, comedy now seems to be for Shakespeare the most important part of the drama. There are signs that Falstaff has "taken hold" of his creator. Yet Shakespeare manages to interweave Falstaff into the narrative right to the end of the first part of the play.

Professor L. Cazamian thinks (2)

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1. "A goodly portly man, i'faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage", etc.
 2. "The Humour of Falstaff".1938.p.121.

that Falstaff as a recruiting officer, in Act IV.sc.ii. is very funny, but that the psychological interest is waning. He thinks that this revives in the cynical catechism on honour delivered by Falstaff in Act V. (sc.i.). But while many French people do not appreciate unintellectual interludes (1), we English readers are more interested in fun than in psychology. That is one reason why we enjoy part two of "Henry IV" all the more. We cannot pass from the first part to the second in the frame of mind which Professor Cazamian suggests with reference to Falstaff's promise to reform (2):

"We are here leaving the purely artistic sphere, and definitely passing on to the ethical one" (3).

The author of that remark had himself said (p.116) of an earlier and similar promise (4) that Falstaff had his tongue in his cheek. The same may be said of the second promise, also. That is the way to approach Falstaff in part two.

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1. Even Professor Cazamian writes on p.125: "We have come down" (N.B.) "to the level of broad, common fun". To the English mind, this is not always a downward progression.
 2. Act V.sc.iv.: "For I'll purge, and leave sack, and live cleanly as a nobleman should do".
 3. The reason given being the approaching rejection of Falstaff by Henry V.
 4. Act I.sc.ii: "I must give over this life, and I will give it over; by the Lord, an I do not, I am a villain". Two lines later, Falstaff is readily agreeing to "take a purse".

In part two, as in part one, Falstaff makes his entry in Act I.sc.ii, again with verbal frivolity and a playing to the gallery, together with the humour he had acquired during part one. He can say quite easily now to his pageboy:

"I do here walk before thee like a sow that hath o'erwhelmed all her litter but one"(lines 11-12).

Meanwhile, the Lord Chief Justice replaces Prince Henry as the foil to Falstaff, and is a victim of the philosophy:

"A good wit will make use of anything" (228).

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Act II.sc.i, Falstaff has an opportunity to prove the force of his own remark, for the rebels are not the greatest of his troubles. However, the hostess is pacified, more easily pacified than most modern readers at the gross comedy of Act II.sc.iv. This seems further to indicate that Shakespeare felt obliged to present Falstaff to us no matter in what sort of atmosphere.

Whereas Act II.sc.iv. of part one had been a masterly scene, the equivalent scene in part two does not anywhere rise above the commonplace. It is Act III.sc.ii. which here achieves distinction. Although some may disagree, this scene of the recruiting is very comic, most of the comedy being wholesome and much of it subtle.

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Falstaff's next contribution to the comedy of "2Henry IV" comes in Act IV (sc.iii), where he declaims on the "twofold operation" of "your sherris-sack". Then in the first scene of the fifth act the Falstaff/Shallow humour reappears, to be carried on later in the next scene but one.

It is in Act V.sc.v, however, the rejection scene, that Falstaff's humour triumphs. He has greeted his King and has been rejected. He comments:

"Master Shallow, I owe you a thousand pounds".

Few apart from Shakespeare or Falstaff could have uttered this when a lifelong hope and belief had been crushed. It is difficult to know what the Elizabethan audiences thought of this. Probably it was part of the comedy, with the listeners quite unperturbed.

Although Falstaff is to be well provided for, however, and possibly "better off" materially, we see that he is overwhelmed by the sudden turn of events. Yet he recovers his composure at once, with a quiet, humorous admission, an admission of defeat (for Falstaff was not usually given to admitting a lost wager) and a proof of his humour. Of course, he felt the rejection keenly:

"the king has killed his heart" (1)

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1. Mistress Quickly's comment in "Henry V".Act II.sc.i.

but he managed to hide his feelings. This is the climax in the play of what Victor Hugo valued above all in England: humour searching for the sublime through the comic and the grotesque.

It is a pity that Shakespeare could not have ended on that high note. His Queen, however, willed it otherwise, and close behind "Henry IV" came "The Merry Wives of Windsor". In this latter play Falstaff becomes a mere buffoon, an unworthy shadow of the former Falstaff.

It is noteworthy that as such he has had a greater success in France than in the earlier plays. There are three reasons why this may be:

First, the play is written almost entirely in prose, and has no verse intermingled with it until the final scene.

Secondly, it is an avowed comedy, not part of a historical cycle.

Thirdly, and this is the most important of the three reasons, "The Merry Wives of Windsor" may be thought of as containing a moral lesson.

That is how the French have understood it, and to such an extent that the play has proved more popular in France than in England. To some French critics, "The Merry Wives of Windsor" is the only comedy that Shakespeare wrote. But if it is

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unfortunate that the Falstaff of "Henry IV" should be so little comprehended and appreciated in France, it is doubly unfortunate that the Falstaff of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" should be set up in his place. Falstaff is as much out of his element at Windsor as Alceste is in Paris. Yet French critics see in him there an upward progression from the Falstaff of London, while it is only possible to say that by English standards the Windsor Falstaff is a poor replica of the Falstaff we met in Eastcheap. He may provide some comic elements, by being the butt of others, but there is here none of the self-mockery of "Henry IV".

In other words, there is no humour. "The Merry Wives of Windsor" is merely a comedy of intrigue, and as such it was appreciated without difficulty in France as early as 1822 (much earlier than the more famous comedies (1) of Shakespeare) when Guizot wrote of it (2):

"Dans le système de la comédie d'intrigue, les 'Merry Wives of Windsor' offrent une composition presque sans reproches, des mœurs réelles, un dénouement aussi piquant que bien amené, et, à coup sûr, un des ouvrages les plus gais de tout répertoire comique".

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1. For example: "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "As You Like It" and "Twelfth Night".
 2. "De Shakespeare et de la Poésie Dramatique". 1822. p.81.

It has been a general feature of French appreciation of Shakespeare's comedy that what we consider to be the finest parts of it have been the least appreciated, and the lesser parts the most appreciated.

It is as though English comedy and French comedy were represented by the letter "U". At the top of one stem is French high comedy, and at the top of the other English "high comedy". The two are separated by a clearly defined gap. Descending the scale, however, the two gradually curve towards each other and finally merge. So that at the top of one stem of the "U" might be placed Harpagon, at the top of the other the Falstaff of "Henry IV". At the bottom we find Scapin and the Falstaff of "The Merry Wives of Windsor".

That is why Guizot could praise the latter play, and why nearly all French critics since have done likewise, at the same time striving hard to try and understand the Eastcheap Falstaff. There is no sense of shame when a Frenchman laughs at the Windsor Falstaff, for Molière had given him farces of a like nature. Furthermore, Shakespeare, so French audiences think, having drawn a series of neat little morals, his play is admitted to have merit.

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When they approach "Henry IV", however, there is a feeling of guilt to be overcome first. This was well brought out in a broadcast talk by Mr. Merlin Thomas called "The Playing of Shakespeare at Avignon" (1). After showing how it was not always understood in France that Shakespeare was a great comic dramatist as well as a great tragic dramatist, and how the translator of "Henry IV", Monsieur Jean Curtis, had sought to rectify this, Mr. Thomas went on:

"The Falstaff scenes, two of which we have recorded, are full of bubbling life and comic exuberance in the French text, and they form as in the original a violent contrast with the serious historical scenes. It is just that which tends to baffle a French audience, - used on the whole to having Molière and Racine on separate evenings. After the first night of "Henry IV" we asked one of the Avignonnais members of the 'Festival Committee' whether he had laughed much during the play. He replied: 'No, not really. But now I know what to expect, I certainly shall laugh when I see the play again in two days' time'".

Mr. Thomas, in bearing out the view that it is on the second visit that the French

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1. Given on the B.B.C. Third Programme on 18th. November 1950. I am indebted to Mr. Thomas for permission to quote from the script of his broadcast.

appreciate Shakespeare's comedy, is reassuring:

"This honestly isn't a pedantic point, - audience reaction proved it beyond a doubt. The play was listened to rather quietly. There was laughter"(1), "but it sounded just faintly guilty, - as though people were saying to themselves: 'I ought not to be laughing, this is a serious historical play by Shakespeare'. But the enthusiasm at the end was enough to show that the audience's restraint during the performance was due to surprise at the unfamiliar, and not to boredom".

The present chapter began with "Henry IV", went on to "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and thence back again to "Henry IV". The reader who approaches Shakespeare's texts in that same order must take into account the odd assortment of satellites who revolve around Falstaff. Who but Sir John could carry a company of characters such as Shallow, Silence, Bardolph and Pistol?

Shallow, among these minor

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1. Despite the fact that much of part 2 was cut to allow historical continuity(the Falstaff/Shallow scenes suffering most). This is an example of how French reaction to Shakespeare has to be judged on parts of his text only.

characters, provokes the most humour. We recall that Mr. John Masefield compared Shallow's humour to last year's crop of apples lying sweetly in the straw of some old loft. What an admirable description that is of the Justice's mellow, pastoral humour. This is often said to reach its height in Act III.sc.ii. of "2Henry IV", where Shallow in a dozen or so lines summarizes at once the comedy and the tragedy of life, its continuity and its temporary nature.

It may seem strange to talk of Shallow's humour "reaching its height" on his first appearance, but it undoubtedly does. Even the best bowmen die, even old Double who could carry you a fore-hand shaft at fourteen and fourteen and a half that it would have done your heart good to see it. And the price of a score of ewes will still be a talking point long after Shallow has gone to join old Double. What, and is old Double dead? Yes, but the bowmen will still clap in the clowt, and the cowmen drive their bullocks to Stamford Fair (1).

This is comic if we concentrate on Shallow, but not if we feel deeply about what Hudson, in a note on these lines in his edition of the play (2) called:

"a strange mixture of something that draws and knits in with the sanctities of our being, and

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1. The above nine lines form a paraphrase of "2Henry IV", Act III.sc.ii.lines 40-50.
2. 1852.

'feelingly persuades us what we are'".

Shallow's foil, Hazlitt tells (1) us, on this and other occasions, is Silence:

"In point of understanding and attainments, Shallow sinks low enough; and yet his cousin Silence is a foil to him; he is the shadow of a shade, glimmers on the very edge of downright imbecility, and totters on the brink of nothing".

That is a description which, in addition to being picturesque, has the added merit of being accurate; accurate, that is, regarding Silence as a comic character, for we love Silence the man: he is as golden as his abstract namesake. A French comic writer might have made him a butt for moral satire, an example of how not to behave in French company. Shakespeare takes him up in more kindly fashion. He will provide some humour, as, again in the words of Hazlitt:

"he sits in the orchard, and eats his carraways and pippins among the rest".

It is an English habit rather than a French one to love such characters as these.

In general the French do not understand Silence. Nor do they understand another of Falstaff's circle, Pistol, who is anything but silent.

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1. "On Shakespeare and Ben Jonson". In: "Lectures on the English Comic Writers". 1819.p.61.

They do not admire this "miles gloriosus", one of a type found both in English and in French literature at the time of Rabelais.

There is not much comedy in Pistol apart from his bragging bravado, but there is some. The French tend to ignore it, missing what little extra comedy there is in this man who speaks(1) of Africa and golden joys, and who will only divulge his news when Falstaff begins to address him in true Pistolian fashion:

"O base Assyrian knight, what is thy news?
Let King Couitha know the truth thereof"(2).

Mr.J.B.Priestley (3) emphasized that one must study more adequately Pistol's swashbuckling in order to understand him:

"Thus an intelligent foreigner who knew his Shakespeare would perceive that Pistol is a loud-mouthed, swaggering, cowardly bully, of a type familiar in the literature of the time, and leave it at that. He would miss the glorious absurdity, just as many insensitive or over-serious English readers do".

He is not a lovable character, this ancient of Falstaff, but one who has a certain absurd comedy which, however slight, is in addition

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1. "2Henry IV".Act V.sc.iii.line 91.

2. Ibid.lines 92-93.

3. "Falstaff and his Circle".1929.p.69.

to the comedy in which his type specializes.

An admirable aspect of these minor characters of "Henry IV" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor" is that we English may associate each with some person known to us in real life. Such, indeed, is the life which abounds in them that critics have sought actual historical connections. It seems more important, however, to show not that Shallow must have been Sir Thomas Lucy, but that he, and Silence, and Pistol, and Bardolph and Davy and the Host and Hostess have, through Addison, Goldsmith, Thackeray, Dickens and others, long lines of descendants which are not yet finished, in literature or in life. Taken together, and with Falstaff at their head, they form a family which has remained stubbornly English. It lives still in an English village, in front of an English fire, with its feet on an English mantelpiece.

Thus, although it is said that Falstaff and his friends would be at home anywhere, it is difficult in some respects to see how they can be loved and appreciated anywhere outside England.

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Chapter 14

Shakespeare's "Moral Lessons" and the French

The previous chapter, on Falstaff ("tragedy in comedy") was said to counterbalance chapter 8 ("comedy in tragedy"). This present chapter carries the balance a stage further: chapter 9 discussed two French "misconceptions" of Shakespeare's tragedy, and, with reference to comedy now, we shall find an analagous French reaction to "The Taming of the Shrew" and "Measure for Measure".

"The Taming of the Shrew" has rivalled, and even outbid in recent years, "The Merry Wives of Windsor" as the most popular of Shakespeare's comedies appearing on the French stage. In many ways it has, like its rival, been better relished in France than in England.

When the French first interpreted "The Taming of the Shrew", they saw it as a theme which had appeared more than once in their own minor literature, just as Shakespeare's version was not the first in English literature (1). According to the critic Geoffroy, several lesser-known French authors at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the

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1. e.g. The anonymous "The Taming of a Shrew", 1594. This version appeared a few months before that of Shakespeare.

nineteenth century had tried to write plays in which bad-temper, stubbornness and similar uncooperative traits were cured by remedies of the same nature, that is to say by what has come to be known as homeopathic treatment. "Homeopathic" is a word one finds often in French criticisms of "The Taming of the Shrew"; it suggests a point of view not often found in English criticisms of the play.

One of these minor plays on the "Shrew" theme which is still extant is "La Jeune Femme Colère" (1) of Etienne. This in turn was based on one of the moral tales of the Comtesse de Genlis (1746-1830) called "Le Mari Instituteur". In Etienne's play, the bad-temper of Rose is cured by a joint effort on the part of her husband Emile and her brother Volmar. When those two have deliberately broken most of the furniture in the house, and themselves deliberately lost their tempers at the slightest provocation, Rose begins to see that there must be an easier way of living. Gradually it occurs to her that she has been "cured in her own humour". Whereupon domestic bliss is once again restored. This play is purely and simply a moral lesson; that is its "raison d'être". Only on a slender basis could "La Jeune Femme Colère" be likened to "The Taming of the

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1. 1805. To be found in vol.1 of "Bibliothèque Dramatique au Répertoire Universel du Théâtre Français". By Charles Nodier and P. Lepeintre. 1824.

Shrew" as a play with a moral.

Charles Nodier is reputed to be the author of a selection of gems from Shakespeare, published anonymously in 1801, which obviously reveals a deep love of Shakespeare's genius. If Nodier was the author, then either his views had changed by 1824, or it was left to Lepeintre to write (1):

"Mais les personnages que l'auteur dramatique anglais"(Shakespeare)"met en action, sont les plus grossiers qu'on puisse imaginer, et quoiqu'il en fasse des gens de bonne maison, il leur prête un langage et des actions dignes des matelots et des habitants d'un marché. Petruchio, qui a servi de type à l'Emile de M.Etienne, et à l'Hippolyte de Madame de Genlis, est un misérable déhonté qui n'a pas la moindre notion de savoir-vivre, et Catharina, qui est l'original de notre jeune femme colère, tient des propos qui feraient rougir les prostituées d'aujourd'hui. Shakespeare fit sans doute cette pièce pour amuser le bas peuple de Londres, chez qui l'on bat sa femme encore plus qu'à Paris".

The only part of this which is true is that Shakespeare wrote the play to amuse the people of London. The characters of Shakespeare's play are not the vilest creations imaginable, and if any

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1. p.281 of the volume quoted in the footnote on the previous page.

one of them knew how to conduct his affairs it was Petruchio. Katharina's tongue is, of course, sharp, but she is not lewd.

Happily, the above view did not gain ground in France. What did take root was the idea that the lesson to be drawn from a comedy was its most important aspect, and that other considerations were unimportant, and relevant only inasmuch as they helped towards the moral aim. Thus, Alfred Mézières could say in 1860 (1):

"Shakespeare n'oublie jamais le point de vue moral",

and could follow this(p.122) by saying that practically all Shakespeare's comedies have a moral aim. The poet Alphonse de Lamartine was convinced of the same thing, and Paul Stapfer (2) related that viewpoint to the "Taming of the Shrew" in particular:

"Une pièce de son théâtre répond assez à l'idée que nous nous faisons en France de la comédie: c'est "La Méchante Femme Mise à la Raison". Ici l'élément fantastique est nul; l'action, pleine de verve et de gaieté naturelle, se développe raisonnablement et logiquement, et une idée morale d'une clarté parfaite s'en dégage à la fin -----".

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1. "Shakespeare, ses oeuvres et ses critiques".
2nd.edition 1865.p.77 (1st.edition 1860).
2. "Molière et Shakespeare".1887.p.10.

Stapfer later adds(p.341) a reference to the value of the same comedy:

"Cette comédie a donc un sens, et un sens très utile".

Many French critics have been convinced of this without being certain what the lesson is. Presumably their words refer to Katharina, who is to serve as a warning to womanhood in general to be of sweet temper and subservience. The fingers of those critics point almost without exception to Katharina's speech on the submission of wives to their husbands (1):

"Such duty as the subject owes the prince
Even such a woman oweth to her husband".

This

speech, like Biron's on Love (2) has been generally well received on the French stage, being in the tradition of French Classical comedy.

However, one or two critics have not found the moral lesson particularly to their taste. Faguet found it childish and drawn out, and preferred the Latin/Music lesson (3) of Act III.sc.i. (4), for which there is a parallel in "Le Barbier de

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1. Act V.sc.ii.lines 134-177.
2. "Love's Labour's Lost".Act IV.sc.iii.line 286f.
3. "Hac ibat - as I told you before - Simois - I am Lucentio - Hic est - son unto Vincentio of Pisa - sigeia tellus - disguised thus to get your love",etc.
4. "Propos de Théâtre".1903.pp.79-80.

Séville". In making this observation Faguet, though writing in 1903, was doing pioneer work, for up till then there was nothing of interest in "The Taming of the Shrew" for the French apart from the moral lesson. Even now, few French people feel that there are any other details worthy of attention.

The most important omission in French knowledge of the play is one which we ourselves have done little to remedy: a study of the character of Petruchio. We may be sure that the moral lesson in "The Taming of the Shrew" has been indeed overrated in France, and that to the detriment of the other comedy in the play. If we are to accept the play as a handbook on the taming of "shrews", it implies that the method used by Petruchio guarantees success. But it does not: it depends on the individuals concerned.

In any case, it seems likely that the character of Kate in conflict with that of Petruchio was merely a peg on which Shakespeare could hang his farce (1), and that her change of character is in keeping with Shakespeare's happy endings. Moreover, if she had not lost her shrewishness, if Freudian psychology were to replace Elizabethan psychology, the play would have been a tragedy, not a witty and pleasant comedy.

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1. Their first meeting (Act II.sc.i) seems to bear this out.

Furthermore, if Petruchio insists on giving orders such as:

"Katherine, that cap becomes you not: off with that bauble, throw it underfoot"

as late as Act V. sc.ii(lines 119-120), it may suggest that Petruchio needs taming,also.

Too much emphasis has been placed by the critics on Katherine and not enough on Petruchio. Probably because most critics are men, Kate's change of temper has been the cause of much glee. Yet to put the emphasis more on Petruchio gives access to a wider view of the comedy in the play. The last two lines:

Hortensio: "Now, go thy ways; thou hast tamed a curst shrew.

Lucentio : 'tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so"

give us the right to do this. They indicate both the difficulty of the undertaking and admiration for him who has successfully performed the task.

Petruchio does not approach Kate with the predetermined attitude of reforming her character. He wants a wife, a rich wife, and is delighted when Hortensio describes a possible candidate whose only fault is that:

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"she is intolerable curst
And shrewd and froward" (1).

Petruchio

knows himself well enough (2); without any doubt he would prefer a Kate to a Rosalind. Therefore, he accepts the challenge (3):

"For I will board her, though she chide as
loud

As thunder when the clouds in autumn crack".

This puts the wooing on a lower plane altogether. If Petruchio had been fired with reformatory zeal, his love would have had to remain in Heaven, whereas in fact it is very much "down-to-earth". Professor H.B.Charlton puts this very well(4):

"To the chivalrous, love is a state of worship; to him"(Petruchio)"it is a problem of wiving. Its object is not primarily a search for spiritual bliss in the contemplation of the beloved. It seeks merely a guarantee of domestic comfort".

In direct contrast to that of the two gentlemen of Verona, Petruchio's idea of living is a pint of beer, a large slice of cheese, and a loving and obedient wife. To this end, he will have

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1. Act I.sc.ii.lines 89-90.

2. Grumio knows him well, also.Ibid.lines 108-110:
"O' my word, an she knew him as well as I do, she would think scolding would do little good upon him",etc.

3. Ibid.lines 95-96.

4. "Shakespearian Comedy".1945.p.98.

to break Kate's shrewishness (not her spirit, which he admires). It is not that he chooses, in the way Etienne's counterpart chose, to "cure like by like". For Petruchio is himself of Ketharina's character and cannot help but tame her in the way we know so well.

When they first meet (in Act II. sc.i), the ensuing battle of wits is between two similar characters and not between a shrew and one who has determined to become equally shrewish. Kate is more than a match for Petruchio, and he respects her for it. Again, one might make a moral lesson of that, but it is doubtful whether this is necessary, or desirable, or the most important aspect of the play. Petruchio is, moreover, delighted to find that his chosen one is not:

"rough and coy and sullen",

but what, to him,

is equivalent to:

"pleasant, gamesome, courteous" (1).

Henceforth,

he knows what the outcome must be:

"Thou must be married to no man but me;

For I am he am born to tame you Kate" (2).

Both parts of this are proved true, and Kate and Petruchio arrive at their home. After the first skirmishes, one of the servants says:

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1. Act II.sc.i.lines 238-240.

2. Ibid.lines 269-270.

"He kills her in her own humour" (1).

This means that Petruchio's bad-temper is mastering Kate's, and in those few words from Peter is the first, and only a small hint of a possible moral lesson.

Yet upon that foundation so much has been built. Petruchio's conduct during his courtship and wedding could hardly be called homeopathic (2), and when in Act IV.sc.i (lines 188-211) Shakespeare, in the way he has, shows us Petruchio's real thoughts, this attitude should not be referred back to earlier scenes and thus mar our enjoyment:

"Thus have I politicly begun my reign
And 'tis my hope to end successfully.

This is a way to kill a wife with kindness
And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong
humour.

He that knows better how to tame a shrew,
Now let him speak: 'tis charity to show".

A narrative, however, is not sufficient to show the change in Kate's temper. Shakespeare could not afford to miss the episode of the tailor and the haberdasher (Act IV.sc.iii), an

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1. Act IV.sc.i.lines 238-240.

2. Even if it is so construed, it has a much greater significance as farce than as psychiatry.

almost exact replica of a scene from "The Taming of A Shrew"(1594). There is, also, the brilliant personal touch on the ride back to Padua (1), where Kate "mistakes" an old man for a "young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet". She is, of course, surprised to find Petruchio agreeing that the person they are looking at is really an old man. Whereupon, with infinite grace, she remarks:

"Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes,
That have been so bedazzled with the sun,
That every thing I look on seemeth green:
Now I perceive thou art a reverend father;
Pardon, I pray thee, for my mad mistaking".

Kate has certainly reformed. Yet the real moral lesson, a slight one, occupies no more than a part of the fourth act; it is not justifiable to appreciate a five-act comedy by reference only to a part of one act. There is a moral lesson, but let it take its appropriate place in the comedy, and not exclude other comic elements.

In "The Taming of the Shrew" much of the play is ignored if the moral of homeopathic "anti-shrew" treatment is over-emphasized. One might find other morals in the play: that Mr. Christopher Sly and others would have been better had they drunk less; that Tranio and Lucentio would have saved much

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1. Act IV.sc.v.

trouble if they had avoided the exchange of identities; that Hortensio and Lucentio might have saved money by not gambling; that Gremio was too old to love. However, the "doctors" who attended Sly would not have considered these interpretations worthy of a play created to :

"frame your mind with mirth and merriment"(1).

"The Taming of the Shrew" is not a poetical play (2) like "A Midsummer Night's Dream". It is not a golden comedy in the manner of "As You Like It". It is not humorous as Falstaff is. It is a laughter-raising farce, and the object of turning our attention away from Kate towards Petruchio was to try and give access to this farce. There is indeed much farce in Petruchio's encounters with Kate, and even during her absence.

Biondello's description of Petruchio's wedding outfit (3) and the latter's subsequent appearance adorned in it, show the truth of this. It was Lord Tennyson who ascribed to Biondello's description a Rabelaisian allure, and it is not difficult to see why. When one reads the passage in a French translation, however, at once

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1. Prologue to "The Taming of the Shrew".
2. On the contrary, it is probably the least poetical of Shakespeare's plays.
3. Act III.sc.ii.

something is seen to be missing: in fact, ironically, that very Rabelaisian air:

"passess'd with the glanders and like to mose in the chine" (1)

- and that is only the beginning of the description of Petruchio's nag. In the English, however, there can be few descriptions more "Gallic" and less reminiscent of French "bon goût!"

Much more French, indeed, are the figures of the sub-plot, the stock figures of classical comedy. Shakespeare manages to endow them with his usual individuality, but Sly, Gremio, Grumio, Curtis, Nathaniel, Gregory, Philip, Peter and company have the stamp of the servants to be found both in English and French classical comedy. There is, for example, the same mixture of ignorance and shrewdness, lack of learning and fund of wisdom, amiable impudence and wit. There is much there to laugh at, together with the comedy of disguise and intrigue.

If nothing very profound emerges, it is because Shakespeare had not yet written "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "As You Like It". Nevertheless, set in the development of comedy, English and Shakespearean, the play has its place. It carries on from George Gascoigne's translation of

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1. Act III.sc.ii.lines 51-52.

Ariosto's "Suppositi" (1), appears at about the same time as the anonymous "The Taming of A Shrew", and ensures that in England the romantic comedy is to triumph over the classical. The French critics perhaps read too much of Ben Jonson's work into Shakespeare's plays, and it is important to see that the moral aim of "The Taming of the Shrew", which may not be appropriate outside the bounds of the play, is not the only element of it. If they can forget the moral and laugh at the farce, the later and greater comedies of Shakespeare will be seen in better perspective.

Yet one wonders, even in making that simple statement, whether English thought and French thought follow similar lines. Most of us would understand the "later and greater" comedies of Shakespeare to be "A Midsummer Night's Dream"; the Falstaff plays, "Twelfth Night" and "As You Like It". When, however, Professor H.B.Charlton stated that "As You Like It" and "Twelfth Night" were the best and most representative of Shakespeare's comedies (2), Professor Bonamy Dobrée denied this (3), maintaining that "All's Well that Ends Well" and "Measure for Measure" were less superficial and more masculine.

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1. "Hundreth Sundrie Flowers. Bounde up in one small poesie: gathered partly by translation in the fyne outlandish gardins of Euripides, Ovid, Petrarke, Ariosto, and others, and partly by invention out of our owne fruitful orchardes in England". 1573.
 2. "Shakespearian Comedy". 1938. p. 266.
 3. In "The Spectator" of 25th. February 1938.

That is, we feel, the generally accepted French view.

We are now concerned, therefore, with showing how "Measure for Measure", taken by the French as an example of "high comedy" or "masculine" satire, differs because Shakespeare wrote it from what it might have been if a Frenchman, some Molière/Racine, had written it. This will serve to throw into relief yet another difference between English and French comedy, to show in fact that "high" comedy is often near to tragedy, and to underline a further difficulty in French appreciation of Shakespeare (1). As was true of the second part of chapter 9 (2), so the second part of this chapter is not concerned with a "misconception" as radical as the first part. As we shall see, French criticism has offered a new and important approach to "Measure for Measure".

Among the many names ascribed to "Measure for Measure", tragi-comedy is almost certainly the most apt. Fletcher's definition of that genre fits the play exactly:

"It wants death which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet it brings some near it which is enough to make it no comedy".

In France, however, tragi-comedy

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1. Because "Measure for Measure" and "All's Well that Ends Well" are selected by French critics as the best of Shakespeare's comedies, they do not necessarily receive unqualified approbation.

2. See p.187f.

is rare after 1628 (1). Making a clear-cut classification the French writers have put "Measure for Measure" in the comedy class, although many must feel that if the theme of this play had been treated in French drama, it would have been by Racine, or if by Molière, then by a greatly altered one.

The crimes which Molière exposes and ridicules: overdoses of avarice, misanthropy, feminine erudition, social-climbing, foppery, are irritating for those in close proximity to the culprits, but they are not the most evil of crimes. They are more sins of omission than of commission, negative failings rather than positive crimes. They are unsociable, but not illegal.

"Measure for Measure" deals with lust and adultery at two levels of society. Nowhere does Molière portray that, although the "monstrous ransom" is not peculiar to Shakespeare (2). He may have tried in "Georges Dandin", but he satirized the faithful husband rather than the unfaithful wife, and almost became, momentarily, a tragic writer. Again, in "Tartuffe", Elmire's honour is at stake, but no one seriously feels that there is cause for alarm. That is no longer the case in "Measure for Measure", which is

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1. Despite the original sub-title of "Le Cid" in 1636: "Tragi-comédie en cinq actes". See note 1, p.88.
 2. See: "Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure'" by Mary Lascelles. 1953. (chapter 1 particularly).

much nearer in tone to "Phèdre" than to any of Molière's plays.

It is not surprising, however, to find that the French see no likeness at all between "Measure for Measure" and Racine. What allows them to class it with Molière's plays?

First, the fact that they can view Angelo with the same detached air with which they watch Don Juan.

Secondly, the ending, the happy ending which "wants death" and in which each character is released rather than punished. The ending taken out of its context, of course, for to show Angelo married to Mariana is a sweet "punishment" for a vice we would be asked to avoid. Possibly Molière would have left the issue in doubt, with an assumption of pardon, or contrived another unsatisfactory ending similar to that in "Don Juan". However, were it not for the fact that everyone is pardoned, French detachment alone could not make of "Measure for Measure" a comedy, no matter how "high" or "pure".

If Claudio and Angelo had been executed for their lust, the play could not have been other than a tragedy by Racine. On the other hand, the fact that they are pardoned à la Molière would in itself preclude Molière from depicting lust. Due to the separation of the genres in French, we have this

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intriguing state of affairs: the initial theme of "Measure for Measure" is Racine-like, though the French, rightly from their point of view, see nothing in it akin to Racine, while the un-Racine-like ending justifies comparison with Molière, though Molière has no comparable play and could not thus have ended a play depicting a vice to be avoided.

This is an interesting situation; it mars no one's enjoyment of the play, but gives much food for thought on the differences between English and French drama, and, even more speculatively, on the question of the point at which comedy shades into tragedy.

Even though we may feel that "Measure for Measure" does not succeed as "high" comedy, and ought to be classed as tragedy rather than comedy, let us follow the French outlook and take for a moment the play as they do. Let us suppose that Molière did not write a comparable play, not because he was precluded from so doing, but because he did not think of it. How does the atmosphere of "Measure for Measure" as a moral play differ from what Molière would have written?

We have seen above that Molière, like Shakespeare, would contrive a happy ending. Previous to that, however, the atmosphere would have

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been radically different. Shakespeare does not write with detachment, and is usually quite incapable of mocking his characters. He is sympathetic throughout(1), to the Duke and to Angelo, to Isabella and to Claudio, to Elbow, Abhorson, Barnardine and Pompey. From this Hazlitt adjudged that Shakespeare was not a moral reformer, because morals are dependent on antipathies (2).

Shakespeare does not laugh at Angelo as Molière does at Don Juan. Had he tried to do so, no doubt the laughter would have been bitter and personal, not calm and detached. As it is, Shakespeare, even in his tragi-comedies, retains the traditional warmth of "As You Like It" and of English comedy in general. If he intended "Measure for Measure" to be an objective satire, he failed.

Molière's satire is as urbane as satire could be, but it appears to lack the "unaggressiveness" of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's comedy is concerned chiefly with love, and love to him indeed precludes harsh laughter.

Detachment contrasted with sympathy

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1. Many will feel that Molière also was sympathetic, but perhaps less consistently than Shakespeare.
 2. Not that Hazlitt thought Shakespeare immoral. He believed his attitude to be that of Nature: accept people for what they are.

forms one basic difference. Secondly, Molière, while not despising the opportunity to show the differing consequences of the same vice at extreme ends of the social scale, would not have presented us with Mistress Overdone and Pompey. Lucio might have been included, and Elbow and Froth, while both very Shakespearean, he would have liked and modified for inclusion.

Whatever one may think about their protagonists, Shakespeare and Molière come very close together in their minor roles. While the comic part of "Measure for Measure" is certainly not natural and pleasing (1), Lucio, Pompey and Froth are not displayed to show us their badness, but merely to underline that "there is some soul of goodness in things evil" (2), a doctrine with which Molière must have agreed, if not to the point of gross vulgarity.

Thirdly, one imagines that Molière would have kept his denouement secret until the end of the play (as in the intervention of the King in "Tartuffe"). In "Measure for Measure", the driving force lies initially with Isabella, but as early as the opening of the third act, the events can no longer be controlled by her, but by the disguised Duke. Even though one approaches the play as though one were

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1. Dr. Johnson thought it was both "natural and pleasing".

2. "Henry V". Act IV.sc.i.line 4.

reading it for the first time, one is aware that the Duke has taken the reins and will in his own time stop the runaway mount. In a French version it is likely that a greater element of surprise would have been demanded, and that the Duke would have remained absent almost until the conclusion of the play.

Fourthly, Angelo would have been presented to us with a greater conception of climax. Harpagon becomes meaner and meaner, Monsieur Jourdain more and more ridiculous, Alceste more and more withdrawn. But Angelo advances and recedes as the drama progresses. It is as though Shakespeare had gathered material whose depth he realized only when he began to write the play. One tends at times to forget Angelo, which is not true of any of Molière's protagonists.

Those are the four adverse points most frequently touched upon by French critics of "Measure for Measure" (1). Compared with others of Shakespeare's plays they indicate a greater than usual acceptance in France of a Shakespeare comedy. The same is true of the other "moral" play: "The Taming of the Shrew", dealt with earlier in this chapter.

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1. Briefly: lack of detached observation; bawdy humour; ill-managed denouement; no proper climactic growth in the character of Angelo.

Linking now the two sections of the chapter, we arrive at the fundamental point. While French acceptance of anything of Shakespeare might be thought laudable, with regard to "The Taming of the Shrew" it seems to go beyond what is required and to base its liking of the play on an aspect other than the most important, that is to say on the moral instead of on the farce.

On the other hand, the French critics have approached "Measure for Measure" in the same way, and, due to the different nature of this second play, have been successful. They have, in fact, shown English critics that one way to interpret the more complex aspects, and only those aspects, of Shakespeare's comedies is to find what is not there as well as what is. This was not justifiable in the case of "The Taming of the Shrew", but it may be in that of "Measure for Measure".

English critics generally have viewed "Measure for Measure" with one of two outlooks: that every difficulty in it makes Shakespeare a traitor at worst or a poor dramatist at best; otherwise, that the play is absolutely straightforward. Neither view is correct, and it requires what Mary Lascelles calls (1) "resolutely sustained attention" to

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1. Page 164 of her book quoted in note 2, p.317.

appreciate the best of both points of view.

Thus, the greatest French contribution to Shakespearean studies may be said to have been in the "resolutely sustained attention" which they have devoted to the "problem" (1) comedies. French students of Shakespeare have found the study of these very agreeable, and, while we turn away with regret from Bottom to wrestle with "Measure for Measure", the French adopt the opposite attitude.

"Digging deep" has its pitfalls generally in approaching Shakespeare's comedy, but if it can be confined to the "problem" plays, and strenuously avoided in dealing with "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "As You Like It", it will prove advantageous.

As long as the criticism necessary to appreciate "Measure for Measure", "All's Well that Ends Well" and "Troilus and Cressida" is lacking in English criticism, we may be grateful to the French critics for making a special study of the weakest link in the chain of Shakespeare studies.

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1. It is noteworthy that what we refer to as the "problem" plays of Shakespeare are the least problematical of his plays to the French, and vice versa.

Chapter 15

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" in France - or the Triumph and Fall of Reason

If Shakespeare had taken up his pen in 1595 with the specific intention of writing a play which would baffle generations of French critics, he could not have succeeded more than he has with "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

Un-French in almost all its aspects (1), this play, more than any other comedy of Shakespeare's, has caused great difficulty in discovering its "meaning". Let us, then, join French critics for a moment in the difficult task of analysing a play which was meant to be enjoyed rather than analysed.

It is strange that the French should have and use often a noun "féerie", for which we do not have an adequate equivalent (2), and yet feel so embarrassed in its presence. Perhaps "fancy" is the English equivalent; "fancy" is a typically English word according to Monsieur P. Maillaud, who gives at the same time "lucide" as a typically French word.

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1. The chief exception is the role of the young lovers, which found an echo in the plays of Musset.
 2. "Fairhood", "fairydom" and "fairyism" all exist, but are rarely used.
 3. "The English Way".1945.pp.59-60.

There is our problem: "fancy" opposed to "lucide". The French nation is still trying to discover some meaning in Pantagruel, who is one of the few characters of fantasy in French classical literature (1). Apart from the giant of Rabelais there is relatively little in French literature, not even in La Fontaine, Daudet, Marivaux or Musset, which prepares French readers for the enchantment of the Athenian wood.

Although we do not meet Robin Goodfellow and his kindred spirits until Act II.sc.i, the surprise of their arrival is to the French audience twofold. First, it comes as yet another separate theme to the three already introduced: the Royal lovers and the young lovers in the first scene of the play, and the rude mechanicals in the second. Furthermore, the four themes are not linked until Act V. We have four different plots, then, united only in the final act. That in itself is un-French.

More difficult, however, from the French point of view is the nature of the fourth theme. Confronted with this world of fantasy, of sprites and fairies and of moonlight revels, French reason stumbles and gropes its way awkwardly forward. It wonders how Shakespeare, author of "Hamlet" and "King Lear", could have written the "pointless" scene(2)

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1. Paul Stapfer. "Molière et Shakespeare". 1887. p.166.
2. Act III.sc.ii.

in which Puck leads Demetrius and Lysander in all directions in order to prevent a duel.

It was Charles Lamb who, in his "Essays of Elia" said:

"Spirits and fairies cannot be represented, they cannot even be painted - they can only be believed".

Now there are several references in French criticism to the difficulty of representing the spirits and fairies of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" on the stage (1). Yet however difficult that may be, it is a minor problem compared to that of French incredulity towards them. Shakespeare, to whom fantasy was as much a part of his drama as mythology was to Racine, knew the people who believed in fairies:

"The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact" (2),

and so

they (and Shakespeare would no doubt have agreed to the inclusion of children, also) are quite at their ease with Titania, Oberon and company.

But while we in England may be "of imagination all compact", the French approach to the world of fantasy tends to be one of cool, reasoning,

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1. Cp. Hector Genouy. "Revue de l'Enseignement des Langues Vivantes". 49e. année. no. 7. July 1932. p. 309.
2. Act V. sc. i. lines 9-10.

adult sanity.

Those who know the stories of Beatrix Potter and have compared the English text with the French translation (1) will at once see how grown-up and mature the different characters have become during the process of translation. Jemima Puddle-Duck, barely recognizable as Sophie Canetang, might have been created by Stendhal, while Squirrel Nutkin is transformed into a Colette-like Noisy-Noisette. "La Famille Flopsaut" ("The Flopsy Bunnies") seems to come straight from Mauriac, while it is difficult to believe that Maupassant did not have a hand in writing "Jérémie Pêche-à-la-Ligne" ("Jeremy Fisher"). The French intellect, which often baffles others by its subtlety and profundity, in cases like this baffles itself by creating subtlety and profundity where there is no cause for seeking either.

Still on the same topic, but with more precise reference to the subject in hand, one finds that Monsieur Abel Lefranc published in "Mélanges d'Histoire Littéraire" et de Philologie" (2) an essay of which the very title is at once suspect:

"La réalité dans 'Le Songe d'une nuit d'été' du théâtre shakespearien".

"Réalité" and "songe" go ill

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1. As Mr. Paul Jennings did in "The Observer" during 1953.

2. 1920.pp.301-319.

together, for this is the one play of Shakespeare's where no one should look for reality in any shape or form. Nowhere is Shakespeare so carefree, so lost in the world of make-believe as in "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

French reason, however, must discuss several points of order before the play is acceptable. Thus we have Monsieur Lefranc assuring us that there are close links between "A Midsummer Night's Dream", the Derby family and the ancient city of Chester. Now one cannot but regard this as exaggerated, particularly when the author comments (1):

"Que de détails deviendront sans doute plus clairs par la suite: le choix de Puck, dont l'origine celtique a été si souvent rappelé ----- Chester touche au pays de Galle -----".

One might forgive that excess of reason, if it were not accompanied on the same page by a note:

"L'explication de l'épisode de 'Pyramus et Thisbe' donnée par les commentateurs, supposant que Shakespeare raille, dans toutes ces scènes, les habitudes de ses compagnons de théâtre" (2) "est

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1. p.318.

2. This seems in fact the most likely explanation, if any is needed. Cp. the speech of Polonius in "Hamlet" (Act II.sc.ii): "The best actors in the world either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene indivisible, or poem unlimited -----".

simplement absurde. Il ne peut s'agir que de comédiens bénévoles, improvisés, comme ceux de Chester. Les rapprochements suggérés avec les représentations de Coventry ne sont pas moins inadmissibles, puisqu'il s'agit, chez le poète, des spectacles de la Pentecôte et de la Midsummer, et que ceux de Coventry avaient lieu à la Fête-Dieu".

Many will agree that Monsieur Lefranc does not represent French criticism; yet one can only regret that unnecessary difficulties should be added to those which existed previously. The essential is not so much the truth or falsity of Lefranc's remarks, but rather that they are irrelevant.

One of France's greatest critical abilities: the clear perception of detail, has constantly proved to be a drawback in her appreciation of Shakespeare, and nowhere more than when faced with "A Midsummer Night's Dream". English vagueness is needed here. We wish to make believe and Shakespeare helps us, often with a "foreign" setting (1).

We recall that "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was not known in France before 1886, except as a text (2), but up to the present time there are few

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1. Which, strangely enough, never destroys the English atmosphere of all the comedies, though only the Falstaff plays, "As You Like It" and a part of "Cymbeline" are actually set in England.
2. See note 3, p.337.

signs that the play has been properly enjoyed and appreciated during its seventy-one years' existence there. For instance, in 1932 Monsieur Hector Genouy wrote (1):

"Le 'Midsummer Night's Dream' est donc en une certaine mesure une pièce à thèse -----".

Fortunately, it is clear that Monsieur Genouy is not sure whether it is or is not a "pièce à thèse". We are sure it is not: there is no such genre in fairyland.

Nor do they worry there about astrology, and Puck must still be thinking "what fools these mortals be" if he has read the astrological study which Monsieur C. Cambillard made of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in 1939. Titania represents the Moon and Oberon the Sun, and the data may be applied either to 1595 or to 1598, making the study as ingenious as it is, to an English mind, incomprehensible.

Unfortunately, English critics are not at all immune from this form of criticism. The difference is, however, that an erroneous or irrelevant criticism in Shakespeare's own country is not nearly as damaging as one which is spread abroad, just as an opinion expressed among one's family is less dangerous than a public statement. The French critics will have a poor opinion generally of Shakespeare if we allow certain of them to make,

1. p.308 of his work quoted in note 1, p.327.

unchallenged, statements which are at best misleading.

Where Shakespeare was at his happiest, the French should not have to say with Hippolyte (1):

"This is the silliest stuff that e'er I heard".

If they do say that, we must counter with Theseus:

"The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them".

Whereupon Hippolyta begins to see that:

"It must be your imagination then, and not theirs".

Shakespeare is so easy to understand if one approaches him with imagination.

Let us take as an example the second theme of "A Midsummer Night's Dream", that of the rude mechanicals. Now here is sheer enjoyment, unashamed mirth and good humour, for the rehearsal and presentation of "Pyramus and Thisbe" is one of the funniest episodes created by Shakespeare. The stage-manager is supposed to be Peter Quince, but he willingly lets Bottom take charge of the proceedings. Bottom is not a mere buffoon, as he was made in the eighteenth-and nineteenth-century productions of the

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1. Act V.sc.i.

play, but a great comic character, rivalling Falstaff in humour, though different in technique. Unlike Sir John, Bully Bottom and his friends are not aware that they are being humorous as they attempt something beyond their reach, and so epitomize Bergson's theory(1).

Like the old knight, however, Bottom is completely "débrouillard", at home anywhere, and a striking example of the "survival of the fittest". Bottom will play any part, even Titania's lover, in no matter what guise. He will devise prologues and provide moonshine. He is all the epithets that comedy can provide: ludicrous, comic, ridiculous, humorous, lovable and many more. When he returns to his fellow-actors in Act IV.sc.ii, they are not the only ones glad to see him back.

He had been sent to Titania to cause laughter among his creator's audience, not to create a symbol:

"Il n'est pas douteux que dans la rencontre du tisserand et de la reine des fées, Bottom figure déjà le symbole de la lourdeur, Titania celui de la légèreté" (2).

French reason is again preventing enjoyment of the play, as it does in this further

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1. i.e. that the greatest comic characters are those most unaware of the comedy which they create. See pp.244-246.
2. H.Genouy.op.cit.p.307. See the context of note 2, p.342 of this present work, where we find a similar symbolic quality ascribed to "As You Like It".

example:

"Le contraste" (between Bottom and Titania) "est si fort, le symbole si clair et si expressif, la scène si fantastique et d'une grâce si hardie que cela est à la fois comique, douloureux et charmant, que cela fait plaisir et peine et vous induit aussi en rêverie, et qu'on ne sait si le coeur en est plus serré ou l'imagination plus amusée" (1).

The episode in question was meant to be comic, incongruous rather than symbolic, and one French critic (2) refused to make a symbol of it. In fact Monsieur Sarcey called those who do so:

"les metagraboliseurs de philosophie esthétique" (3).

Sometimes in French versions of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" the names of Bottom, Quince, Snug, Flute, Snout and Starveling have been changed. Letourneur gave them their English names, but in Monsieur Pierre Messiaen's translation (4) they become: Lefond, Lecoin, Bienadroit, Laflute, Lebec and Laffamé respectively. Bottom undergoes a further change by becoming "Mesfesses" in the translation of Monsieur R-L. Piachaud (5). Although one may not

1. Jules Lemaitre. Nouvelle Bibliothèque Littéraire. "Impressions de Théâtre". 1ère.série.1920.p.125.

2. Francisque Sarcey.

3. "Quarante ans de théâtre".1900.vol.3.p.372.

4. 1939.

5. Published in 1947, but first produced as a stage play in 1923.

approve in principle of this changing of names, "Mesfesses" has a certain Shakespearean authenticity about it.

In more serious vein, however, we find that Bottom's speech occasionally loses its homeliness:

"Pour bien faire, il faut dans cette histoire
Quelques pleurs; si c'est moi, gare à mon auditoire.
De larmes, ma douleur va créer un torrent.
Aux autres! C'est égal, j'aime mieux le tyran.
Ma verve s'y plaît mieux et je jouerais ce rôle
d'Hercules de façon si bizarre, si drôle,
Qu'un chat en crèverait, que tout éclaterait"(1).

However, that same speech is better rendered by Piachaud:

"Je vois ça. Il faudra pleurer comme une
vache, pour jouer Pyrame avec vérité. Hé bien! si
c'est moi qui fais Pyrame, ah! mes amis, il n'y aura
qu'à préparer les mouchoirs: je me charge de faire
marcher les grandes eaux. Vous m'entendrez gémir, je
ne vous dis que ça! Et pourtant, un rôle de tyran,
c'était bien mieux dans mes cordes. Par exemple,
j'aurais fait Hercule comme pas un; Hercule, ou enfin
n'importe quel rôle à tout casser!".

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1. Translation of Monsieur Armand Somès. 1923.
Act I.sc.ii.

This second version is further from the English text (1) than is that of Monsieur Somès. Yet it sounds more like Bottom, more like Monsieur Piachaud's description of his own translation:

"libre, prosaïque, rythmée".

At this point, we recall that Professor Emile Legouis, dealing with the explicable absence of "La Psychologie dans 'Le Songe d'une Nuit d'Eté'" (2), said of the play that it showed how wrong it is to try to impose logic on affairs of the heart. It is equally wrong to try to impose it on Bottom, Quince, Snug, Flute, Snout and Starveling.

Professor Legouis' remark invites now an inspection of the two remaining themes of "A Midsummer Night's Dream": the young lovers and, parallel with them, the royal lovers. The chief purpose of the royal lovers, Theseus and Hippolyta, seems to be the setting of the play in motion, and their attendance

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1. "That will ask some tears in the true performing of it: if I do it, let the audience look to their eyes; I will move storms, I will condole in some measure. To the rest: yet my chief humour is for a tyrant: I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split".
2. "Etudes Anglaises". 3e. année. janvier-mars. 1939. pp. 113-117.

at the not very "tedious" (1) and all too "brief" (1) comedy of "Pyramus and Thisbe".

It is in fact the four young lovers who are more often discussed, in France as elsewhere. The adventures of Hermia and Helena, Demetrius and Lysander form a sub-plot which is as gentle and superficial as one could desire. No one seriously doubts that:

"Jack shall have Jill; nought shall go ill" (2).

The plot is too lightly conceived to have any other outcome. Yet the French mind probes deeper than this. The four lovers become Romantic symbols of pathos and despair, of altruism in the face of rejection, of sighs upon a midnight pillow.

The first stage performance in (3) France of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" brought these comments on the amorous quartet from Jules Lemaitre:

"C'est l'éternelle chanson de 'Carmen':
'Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime'" (4).

This was followed by:

"C'est la plainte de Sully-Prudhomme dans
'Les Epreuves':

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1. These are Shakespeare's own words: "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth". (Act V.sc.i.lines 56-57).
 2. End of Act III.sc.ii.
 3. At the Odéon, April 1886; the version in three acts of Meurice.
 4. His work quoted on p.334 (note 1), p.117.

'Nous aimons; et de là les douleurs infinies.
 Car Dieu, qui fit la grâce avec les harmonies,
 Fit l'amour d'un soupir qui n'est pas mutuel'".

Now although "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is the play in which Shakespeare first reveals his mastery of the playwright's art, he would probably have been both puzzled and amused to find himself credited with having done so by creating four introspective, morose, "1830" lovers. Hermia is quite likely to tear out another person's hair, not her own, and Helena's self-pity:

"O spite! O hell! I see you are all bent
 To set against me for your merriment" (1)

should

beguile no one. Lysander and Demetrius, far from burning the midnight oil in heavy sighs, make Puck's task easier by lying down to sleep when the "crisis" is at its height. There is no room here for a Baudelaire and a Chatterton among fairies and mechanicals. These are not Carmens and Sully-Prudhommes. They are merely four figures of amorous fun which Shakespeare knew how to handle, much as he handles the two sets of twins in "The Comedy of Errors". As ever, Shakespeare was interested in his story rather than in its moral application.

Thus it seems that "A Midsummer

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1. Act III.sc.ii.

"Night's Dream" contains much that is still incomprehensible where French audiences are concerned. However, there have been signs during the last three or four years that it is being better appreciated than we might expect.

A party of French schoolchildren seemed to enjoy the varied aspects of the play at Stratford in 1954, if not as thoroughly as their English neighbours. In that production, as in most English performances of the play, each of the four themes was given a definite tone. Now before 1952, such was rarely the case in France. Normally the tendency was not towards a separation of the four strains, but towards an alliance of them. The reduction of the number of acts to three, and the omission of one or other of the sub-plots, seem to have been the two most popular "remedies" in the French attempt to bring unity out of what was to them chaos.

A few years ago, however, as we mentioned earlier, Monsieur Michel St. Denis left the Old Vic and returned to his native France. Since 1952, one of his most successful productions there (1) has been "A Midsummer Night's Dream". The play has been given throughout "a quarter of France", and to quote from Monsieur St. Denis's own words(2):

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1. With the "Centre Dramatique de l'Est".
2. "La Revue Théâtrale". 1954.

"Ce qui nous a tous frappés, c'est que nous avons atteint à la même crédibilité qu'en Angleterre, et nous avons joué la pièce en France selon la tradition anglaise actuelle".

That is to say that each of the four sub-plots is given its own definite atmosphere, as they are in the English text(1). The mechanicals are humorous, the fairies ephemeral, the young lovers bewildered, and the royal couple preside benevolently over all.

The simplest method proves often to be the best; so it does here. There is no need to worry any longer on the grounds that Theseus and Hippolyta have no liaison with Oberon and Titania, or on the score of some other piece of esoteric stage business. By the process of emphasizing the separate parts, the whole appears in better perspective. What was formerly thought to be only ephemeral is seen to be enduring, also, despite its fairy-like quality.

It is too early yet to say whether this view will be permanent in France, or whether it is merely temporary. If it prevails, it will mark another step forward in French appreciation of Shakespeare: the acceptance with as much good-will as there is in the play itself of a thoroughly English piece of fantasy.

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1. And in Mendelssohn's accompaniment.

Chapter 16The "Englishness" of "As You Like It" (1)

A striking point at issue between the French critics and "As You Like It" is that they have rarely seen beyond the title. They have been troubled as to whether it ought to be "Comme vous l'aimez" or "Comme il vous plaira", and even where the individual critic has solved that particular problem, he has generally followed Mr. George Bernard Shaw in seeing in Shakespeare's vague title scorn for the public which came to see the play performed.

Now this is not particularly surprising, for "As You Like It" is as English as can be, as English as a cricket-match played on the village-green. It is not unreasonable, therefore, that the Forest of Arden should refuse to revert to Sir Thomas Lodge's *Ardennes* (2), despite the attempts of some French adaptors of Shakespeare to make it do so.

Upon enquiry, one finds that this play had been little heard of in France until recent

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1. Hippolyte Taine provides us with a liaison between the previous chapter and the present one, for he called "As You Like It": "un demi-rêve", and "A Midsummer Night's Dreem": "un rêve complet".
 2. Sir Thomas Lodge's "Rosalynde" is assumed to be the main source of "As You Like It".

years. It was translated at the beginning with the other plays, Letourneur making a good translation of it. Admittedly he does, having substituted James for Jaques, younger brother of Oliver, in order to avoid confusion with the other, revert to Jaques in Act V. On the other hand, he does retain Touchstone, the first of Shakespeare's professional clowns.

After Letourneur, the play was treated much as were the others of Shakespeare, but when the Romantics arrived, "As You Like It" suffered more than most of Shakespeare's comedies. Complete abandonment of the play (which came eventually about 1857) by the French Romantics would have been better than what actually happened to it between about 1826 and 1856.

That is strange in many ways, because "As You Like It" is one of the most romantic of Shakespeare's plays (1). Yet the French Romantics could see Jaques only through a mist of Childe Harolds, Werthers and Manfreds. Gautier, who incorporated some of the feeling of "As You Like It" into his own "Mademoiselle de Maupin", was not quite so wrong in seeing the play as a drama written for fairies to be played by moonlight, but he erred in further assessing it as a form of magic charm to bring the ideal mistress to the arms of an impassioned lover (2).

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1. Despite Rosalind's ironical speech(Act IV.sc.i) against the idea that a man may die for love.
 2. Professor T.M.Parrot."Shakespearean Comedy". 1949. p.176. See pp.333-334 of this present work, where we saw a similar symbolic aspect ascribed to "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

But if that is not the real "As You Like It", George Sand's version is further removed from the original. Characteristic of her attitude is this description of Jaques (1):

"Son oeil est encore vif et beau; mais sa bouche est une tombe où le sourire est enseveli -----
Au fond de ses récriminations contre le genre humain, je vois toujours briller l'amour du vrai et la haine du mal, comme les étoiles derrière les nuages sombres".

Now France was not the only country to produce statements like the above. But we find that George Sand's version of "As You Like It" was Shakespeare's comedy in the France of 1856, and not merely one attempt set against a background of other and greater interpretations. Thus, in theory, it was essential that her adaptation should be meritorious.

Jaques becomes the centrepiece of this adaptation, of which the moral is the conversion of cynic into philanthropist by means of love. No one who has read George Sand's novels will be astonished at this turn of events, for, to give only a single instance, one recalls how La Petite Fadette underwent

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1. One need hardly point out that George Sand refers to the better known of the two Jaques in "As You Like It". She sees him as a combination of Ralph, René and Alceste.

a similar conversion.

In the first of the three (1) acts of this "Comme Il Vous Plaira", the events are similar to those in Shakespeare's first act, though there is no question of its being an accurate translation. One difference is that the unities of time and place require Jaques to accompany Rosalind, Celia and Touchstone.

Act II is a considerable condensation of Shakespeare's equivalent act, and even Jaques' weeping for the stag (2) is omitted, a little surprisingly one would have thought. Having arrived in the Forest, Rosalind reveals herself more quickly to her father, and from then on the adaptor reshapes the plot in accordance with her own "fancies". There are no songs, and Silvius, Phebe, Corin and Mar-text are omitted. Again, we are surprised, having regard to George Sand's temperament, that the pastoral element should suffer so much. At the denouement Celia marries Jaques (not Oliver), and Audrey marries William (not Touchstone).

The author herself justified her adaptation by saying that the total absence of any

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1. Not five as in Shakespeare.

2. Act II.sc.i.lines 47-63:

"'Poor deer', quoth he, 'thou makest a testament
As worldlings do, giving thy sum of more
To that which had too much' -----

----- swearing that we
Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what's worse,
To fright the animals, and to kill them up,
In their assign'd and native dwelling-place".

plan in "As You Like It" authorized some measure of adaptation and arrangement. The first part of that statement is true, for Shakespeare is only interested in bringing his characters as quickly as possible into the Forest of Arden, and then leaving them to "fleet the golden hours carelessly". Entrances are made, comic words are exchanged, and the speakers quit the stage. But even so, it is difficult to justify large-scale alterations to the text, such as George Sand created.

The sub-title of this adaptation is, moreover, significant:

"Tirée de Shakespeare et arrangée par George Sand".

Now her "arrangement", in fact, is an entirely different play. The author might as well have written "Tirée de Lodge", but she did not do so for an obvious reason: the inclusion of Shakespeare's name in the title of her adaptation was a respectable guarantee of success.

No one in 1856 referred back to Shakespeare to see if he had written anything like George Sand's version.

This means, then, that if Shakespeare can be said to have had any success at all, it was that his name was kept before the French public by a woman "littérateur" whose views were

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respected at the time. Yet one would have thought it a greater success if the pastoral element, which is an important aspect of "As You Like It" (1), could have been retained. This would have reintroduced a genre generally disliked in France since the time of d'Urfé's "L'Astrée" (2). What a triumph if, through this play, Shakespeare could have re-established Theocritus in France.

If George Sand intended to portray love, then the love of Rosalind and Orlando, which was sufficient for Shakespeare, would have been preferable. One could not find anywhere a more gentle picture of youthful love. If Marivaux or Musset had written this adaptation, things might have been different. George Sand injects an unnecessary reformatory zeal into the play. That spells work, and, again, there is no enemy of love like work.

Most of us, when reading the English text, are nearly as fond of Celia as we are of Rosalind, but we do not like to see her taking over the other's role, particularly in the way she does. Nor do we like to see Touchstone with clipped wings, nor Jaques in a stiff collar.

Presumably, neither George Sand nor the Romantics in general could laugh at Jaques; Jaques is English, not French, though Professor

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1. Even though no birds or flowers are mentioned by name.
 2. Published c.1608 in five volumes.

Baldensperger disagrees (1). Jaques is sad, but it is a whimsical, humorous sadness, not a moody, cynical melancholy. All the world's a stage to him, and he uses it to announce his thoughts and thereby amuse and entertain us. He goes deeper than Touchstone, but is nowhere completely dejected and subdued. It is merely that Jaques is:

"for other than for dancing measures",

as he

himself tells us at the close of the play. He was not irreligious to begin with: he merely wished to see what he could learn from the Duke:

"----- out of these convertites
There is much matter to be heard and
learn'd" (2).

The simple truth is that Jaques liked hearing, learning and quiet conversation better than he liked life at Court.

Pastoral, unintellectual comedy, loose form, all is essentially English in "As You Like It". Even the minor role of Adam is entirely English. He has only a few lines, yet they are difficult to reproduce in French productions. For Adam is an old man and his lines need only feeling, not voice or deportment. Lines like these (3) cannot

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1. "Le Siège de Rouen". In "Comparative Literature Studies".vol.3.1941.p.6.

2. Act V.sc.iv.

3. Last speech of Act II.sc.iii.

be declaimed:

"Master, go on, and I will follow thee,
To the last gasp, with truth and loyalty.
From seventeen years till now almost fourscore
Here lived I, but now live here no more.
At seventeen years many their fortunes seek;
But at fourscore it is too late a week:
Yet fortune cannot recompense me better
Than to die well and not my master's debtor".

Looking back to the year 1856, we find that after George Sand's version of "As You Like It", first performed at the "Comédie-Française" on the 12th. of April of that year, the play was not seen again on the French stage until 1934 (1). That gives a good idea of what the French as a whole thought of one of the best of Shakespeare's comedies between 1856 and 1934. Furthermore, anyone wishing to refer during that time to "As You Like It" on the French stage could find only a version which was far from satisfactory.

In 1934, Monsieur Copeau and Monsieur Barnowski sought, unwittingly, to improve the position by producing two versions of the play, Copeau at the "Atelier" and Barnowski at the "Champs-Élysées" the following day. But this sudden activity did not

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1. That is, after an interval of seventy-eight years.

mean that "As You Like It" had achieved popularity in France. What it did mean was that there was now a chance of its popularity becoming more of a possibility there. The two versions of 1934, Monsieur Copeau's in particular, were a great improvement on that of 1856, especially as nothing had been done in between.

It was one year later, in 1935, that there appeared a "Comme Il Vous Plaira" which is almost a literal translation. The translator and adaptor was Monsieur Jules Supervielle; his may be put among the very few good French translations of the play.

Monsieur Supervielle's chief adaptation was to condense the final act, the prolongation of which has always been disliked by his fellow-countrymen. They do not resent the length of the act as such, but what they consider to be irrelevant "Nonsense" at a point where the end should come swift and sure. Jules Supervielle evidently agreed with this, for he left out what was not strictly relevant to the main action, including Touchstone's famous "replies" (1) in the last scene

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1. The Retort Courteous, the Quip Modest, the Reply Churlish, the Reproof Valiant, the Countercheck Quarrelsome, the Lie with Circumstance and the Lie Direct.

of the play. These are generally omitted nowadays in English stage versions, also: at the Old Vic in March 1955, for instance.

However, that is a producer's problem, not a Shakespearean one, and we who approach Shakespeare more personally may sit at home and enjoy everything from the "Retort Courteous" to the "Lie Direct". George Sand thought it strange and incomprehensible that Shakespeare should have put comedy such as this alongside the grace of Rosalind and the dignity of Orlando. She would not admit that Shakespeare was merely bringing his audience down to earth with the kind of comedy then enjoyed by players and listeners alike.

The adaptation of Monsieur Supervielle was performed at the "Champs-Élysées" up to the beginning of the war, but it was only after 1945 that the play became appreciated, particularly in the production of 1951. Yet it was about this production that the quotation included on page 70 was written, and written by a woman, incidentally:

"Les spectateurs auxquels Shakespeare destinait sa comédie voulaient, avant tout, être charmés. Ceux d'aujourd'hui ont-ils le même désir?".

It was said then that the answer, broadly speaking, is "Yes" in England, "No" in France. In the light of that, it is difficult to say that

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"As You Like It" is now a popular play in France, for despite obvious improvements since 1856, that "Englishness", that carefree air of non-utilitarian entertainment that pervades Shakespeare's Forest of Arden has remained to the French an unsolved mystery.

However, there is evidence that it may one day come to pass that the French will enjoy "As You Like It", for in this last year or two, minor companies in France have been rivalling the zest which Shakespeare's own actors must have displayed. It will be strange, but pleasant, if a company from Southern France is able to teach "English comedy" to the more "English" regions of Northern France. One hopes that someone will manage to do so, because it is as much a misconception to make "As You Like It" a play with a purpose as it is to make Macbeth a masculine Phèdre(2). If there has to be a moral in "As You Like It", it is Corin who supplies it:

"Sir, I am a true labourer: I earn that I eat, get that I wear; owe no man hate; envy no man's happiness; glad of other men's good, content with my harm; and the greatest of my pride is: to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck" (3).

With that philosophy at least, and with Shakespeare's approval, both England and France will agree.

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1. For example, the "Grenier de Toulouse".
 2. See chapter 9, pp.187-196.
 3. Act III.sc.ii.

Part IV

Conclusion

Chapter 17

Conclusion

In summing up the attitude of the French towards Shakespeare one has to be wary of being a Tartuffe of criticism. When we assess the French approach to Shakespeare, where it has been "wrong", where "right" and where "indifferent", we have to realize constantly that a person or a country may look and then appear to copy, without actually doing so.

Furthermore, the theatre in France has been a great battlefield of French literary criticism since the time of Voltaire. Generations of French producers have tried to cut the stuff of Shakespeare's plays according to the pattern of the French stage. Often, like Garrick, their professed aim has been "to lose no drop of that immortal man", which has meant in reality inserting verses and irrelevant stage-business of their own.

In addition, many French critics seem to base their criticisms of Shakespeare on stage representations only, without the support of a quiet perusal of the text. In connection with this Mr.M.R.Ridley (1), while insisting that we do not know

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1. In the 30th.British Academy Lecture. 1940.

a play until we have seen it well acted, thought that reading would reveal, even to Shakespeare's own nation:

- (a). A better understanding of his characters.
- (b). A better appreciation of his poetry.
- (c). A clearer perception of his meaning.

Most French translators and critics have said in effect:

"Shakespeare comme il est, ou pas du tout" but

few have been able to carry out that precept. Thus, Shakespeare is looked upon by the French as someone who was incapable of writing for the French stage.

Georges J.M. Pellissier (1) said that Shakespeare:

"ne sera jamais chez nous, au moins sur la scène, qu'un étranger naturalisé".

Seventy years later, he is still no more than that, and should be regarded as such; the use of the English text in France will help to keep him in true perspective. There is the danger, of course, of a repetition of the story (2) which Victorien Sardou liked to tell about an English

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1. "Le Drame Shakespearien sur la Scène Française". 1886.p.221.

2. Noted by Georges Mouly in "Sardou et Shakespeare". "La Revue de France". 1st.November 1932.p.80.

actor in Paris, who, forgetting exactly what was to be or not to be, improvised a fantastic soliloquy. At its conclusion he was enthusiastically applauded:

"Sublime! Sublime! Ah! ce Shakespeare!
Quel génie!".

As we look back towards the past, it is clear that Shakespeare and France have never been, and still are not entirely united. There was good work in the eighteenth century, and as early as 1778 the first volume of the second edition of Shakespeare by Johnson and Steevens had this note referring to La Place and Letourneur:

"Let me not forget the justice due to these ingenious Frenchmen, whose skill and fidelity in the execution of their very difficult undertaking, is only exceeded by such a display of candour, as would serve to cover the imperfections of much less elegant and judicious writers".

However, it would be incorrect to deduce from this that Shakespeare had a profound influence on the late eighteenth century in France, for he did not. Even in the nineteenth century, though his influence was growing, it was not sufficient alone to account for the "Romantic Revolution". Moreover, the position is further complicated by the fact that we in

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England did not mean in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by "Shakespeare" what we mean by "Shakespeare" now. It was a Frenchman, N. de la Coste (1730-1820) who rebuked Garrick in 1786 (1) for his travesties of Shakespeare's plays. When France was "receptive", we ourselves did not fully appreciate Shakespeare. As we became more appreciative, France lagged behind, for the reasons set out in the first four chapters of this work.

Obviously, years of increasing study have led to progress, and the position is better now than it has ever been. In a similar context, Mr. Martin Turnell said of Racine in England that:

"the attitude of respectful incomprehension" (seems) "much more promising than the arrogant dislike of former generations" (2).

The same applies to "Shakespeare and France", and if one may add this, "respectful incomprehension" seems ultimately better than the blind adoration of the French Romantics towards Shakespeare.

There is much of Shakespeare, as we have seen, which comes not into French favour, but there are certain elements which they find pleasing. In some cases, indeed, they have given us a lead on how to appreciate Shakespeare. French critics

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1. In "Voyage Philosophique d'Angleterre".
2. Preface to "The Classical Moment". 1947.

generally have been sincere and eclectic in their approach to Shakespeare. The present position is that they like him, but he has not supplanted the national drama of their own country. What many people fail to realize is that if a French dramatist today were to produce a Shakespearean play, he would be attacked even by those Frenchmen who like Shakespeare.

However, one pleasing feature of post-war French criticism of Shakespeare has been the increasing desire to see him as a playwright rather than a philosopher, a poet rather than a prophet. When Monsieur Paul Reyher adopted that particular view in 1947 (1), it was a new interpretation.

Nevertheless, one is forced immediately to return to the other aspect of the question. On the debit side, as far as Shakespeare appreciation is concerned, France is still held back by being an intellectual nation. One still finds melancholy comments like that of Monsieur Thierry Maulnier's after seeing Monsieur Julien Bertheau's production of "Romeo and Juliet" at the "Comédie-Française" (2) in 1952. The play, he said, was well produced, but the magnificence of the scenery was excessive, and the actors, even in 1952, were too

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1. "Essai sur les Idées dans l'Oeuvre de Shakespeare".
 2. "Shakespeare Survey".vol.7.1954.p.110.

steeped in the tradition of Molière and Racine to live before our eyes as creatures of Shakespeare's imagination. Even the translator, Monsieur Jean Sarment, said that the French still could not accept Shakespeare without alteration:

"Les Français ne peuvent pas encaisser trop directement Shakespeare" (1).

It is noteworthy that those Frenchmen who have succeeded most in accepting Shakespeare have adopted a personal approach: Alfred de Musset, Amédée Pichot and Victorien Sardou, for example. Accordingly, theirs have been among the most thoughtful of French opinions on Shakespeare. No one of them liked the whole of Shakespeare, but each of them found something in his work to admire. Their conclusions were neither national nor sectarian, but individual (2).

We may say that, in general, the French approach to Shakespeare has followed closely the pattern of one of their political revolutions: calm, first sparks, sporadic outbursts, chaos,

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1. Ibid.

2. Cp.: Alfred de Musset: Lettre à Paul Foucher. 23rd. September 1827. "Correspondance" (1827-1857). ed. Léon Séché. 1907. See note 2, p. 276 of this present work.
Amédée Pichot : "Galerie des Personnages de Shakespeare". 1849.
Victorien Sardou: Letter preceding the translation of a selection of Shakespeare's plays by Jules Lermina. 1898.

recriminations, apostasy and afterthoughts.

In following certain of Shakespeare's plays through various combinations of these different phases, we have been tracing the fascinating development in two great literatures of the conception of tragedy and comedy. Although there have been outstanding similarities between our view and the French, the overall picture has been of differences. In the final analysis there are two points which seem to stand out clearly in studying the different approach to tragedy and to comedy in English and in French literature.

First, with regard to tragedy, there was a "vacuum" in France between the last of the Mystery plays (c.1550) and Corneille's "Le Cid"(1636). If those who flourished in the literary interregnum of 1550-1636, principally Garnier, Hardy and Montchrestien, could have had more of the genius of Corneille or Shakespeare and thus produced a vigorous drama of wide appeal, there might not now exist so wide a division between the English and the French conceptions of tragedy.

Secondly, with regard to comedy, if France had turned towards England after Jodelle's "Eugène"(1552), instead of drawing inspiration from Spain and from Italy, the comedy of Shakespeare would

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probably fit much more easily into the French pattern.

It is because neither of these hypotheses became a fact that we are able today to discuss the differences between "English and French Theories of Tragedy and Comedy", and to see in doing so what this has meant in terms of the reception in France of the works of our most eminent dramatist: Shakespeare.

The End

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